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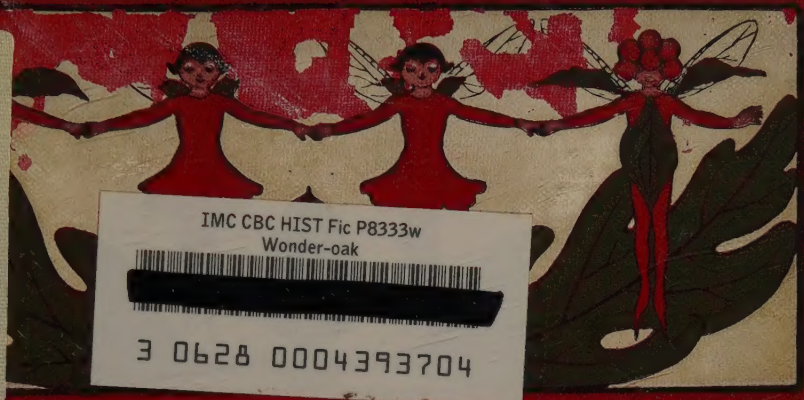

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They watched him fearfully as he cautiously cut his way into the house of Lame Caterpillar

WONDER-OAK

BY
BERTHA CURRIER PORTER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MAY AIKEN

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CHAPTER I

EEP in the wood the great white oak stood tall and motionless. Its rough trunk was covered with glittering ice that sparkled faintly in the starlight. Every bough and twig wore the same brittle, shining armor. The brown leaves that wave so sturdily in the winter wind were still, held fast by the sheet of ice about them. The needles of the pines and hemlocks wore each its icy sheath. Every tree, bush, and tiny shrub was alike a helpless prisoner. Nothing moved in the wood. The stars twinkled brightly, high up in the dark sky.

But far in the heart of the oak—how different! For the great white oak was hollow, and in this hollow was the castle of the Fairy King and Queen!

Just as the royal standard waves over the castle of a mortal king, telling to all who look that the Court is there, so the oak proudly flies its brown leaf-banners all through the

winter storms and gales, a sign to all the wood-dwellers that the Fairy King and Queen are in their home. Snug and warm lives the Court all through the cold weather, and full to the brim are the royal larders with their goodly store of honey, nuts, and berries.

On this New Year's night great things were happening in the castle. The cone fires burned brightly in all the rooms. Rushlights, made from the white pith of the wood rushes, illuminated every corner. Although it was nearly four o'clock in the morning, not a soul was asleep. The King was so excited that he actually appeared without his crown—an unheard-of breach of etiquette. All the noblemen fairies stood about and looked very uncomfortable; all the lady-in-waiting fairies gathered in groups and talked very fast and waved their arms and wings excitedly, and all the little boy and girl fairies dozed and nodded in the corners and wished that they could go to bed.

Down by the great entrance door a footman listened anxiously, and up in the Queen's chamber an old, old nurse-fairy, so old that her wings had turned snowy-white, listened just as eagerly.

Anemone, the Queen's favorite lady in waiting, flew swiftly down the stairs and called to the footman, "Don't you hear anybody yet?"

The footman shook his head. "No," he answered, and listened harder than ever.

"O, she is very late," said the lady in waiting. "The nurse says she never knew her to be so long in coming before."

"How is the Princess?" asked the footman.

"She is the sweetest baby that ever was born," exclaimed the lady in waiting, "and she is the image of her dear mother."

By this time you have probably guessed that all this excitement and commotion was caused by the fact that an heir to the throne of Fairyland had just been born. Now, the King had been very anxious for a Prince to succeed him, but when he saw his dear little daughter he loved her at once, and went about telling everybody how he had always longed for a Princess. Of course everybody knew he hadn't, but that is the way fathers always do, and, besides, nobody dared to contradict him, because he was the King, and a very fierce, hot-headed King he was at times.

He leaped down the stairs now, three at a time, his pussy-willow robe flying straight out

behind him, and roared at the footman: "Where is the Wishing, Christening, Gift-giving Godmother? Who ever heard of a Princess being born without a Godmother? My daughter is nearly an hour old, and not a sign of a Godmother! Where is she, I say?"

The footman's wings quivered with fright as he stammered, "She—she—hasn't c-c-come yet, your Majesty."

Anemone opened the door a crack and peered out into the white world. She shaded her eyes with her hand and looked sharply at a hollow stump in the distance. She thought she saw something move away from the stump. She looked closer; then she shut the door and turned to the King. "I think I see her coming, your Majesty," she said.

"She'd better come!" shouted the King, striding up and down the hall, the long pointed toes of his silken, spider-web shoes slapping on the floor at every step. "She'd better come, I say!"

The door had not opened—no one had heard a sound—but suddenly there stood before the angry King a dainty little old lady, dressed in a splendid lacy robe of snowflakes, bordered with furry frost, such as you see on the window

on cold winter mornings. Her wings were white and glittering, and when the flickering lights from the pine-cone fires touched them, they shone in rainbow colors. A beautiful crown of ice was on her snowy hair, and she carried a long slender icicle in her right hand. The footman shivered but did not move. The lady in waiting fixed her eyes on the Fairy Godmother, but the Wishing, Christening, Gift-giving Godmother looked only at the King.

"What do you mean by keeping me waiting like this? Don't you know that there is a Princess here? Where have you been all this time? Tell me that," he roared without looking at her.

The Godmother did not answer. She only gazed at him without moving, and the King began to walk slower and slower till at last he stood still before her. Then she spoke. Her tones were icy like her robes and her scepter, and the great entrance hall grew cold as she talked. The poor lady in waiting shivered; the footman shivered; and the King drew his pussy-willow robe closer about him.

"I have been," slowly said the Godmother, "to a house in the hollow stump by the sugar maple tree. A boy baby has come to that

home. The father called me in as I passed on my way hither."

"How dared you stop at a common fairy's house when you knew that my daughter, the Royal Princess, was waiting for you?" interrupted the King. He tried to speak severely, but he did not succeed very well, because the cold made his teeth chatter dreadfully.

"Don't presume to dictate to me!" replied the old Godmother. "I remember the day when I stood by your cradle, and a homely baby you were too! I stood by your father's and your grandfather's. If you don't mend your manners, Sir King, and treat me with the respect due one of my age, I'll go at once, and you may try bringing your daughter up without a name, without a wish, without a gift, without a Godmother!" And she turned to go.

The King fell on his knees and grasped her snowflake robe. "O, Godmother, dear, good Godmother," he cried, "forgive me! I often speak before I think. Don't go away! Don't! Stay and see my Princess!" And he groveled at her feet, while the footman winked gleefully at the lady in waiting.

The Godmother turned toward the stairs.

"Let go my robe," she said. "Your fingers are frostbitten already. And don't come upstairs. I'll attend to this matter without your help. Come, Anemone!"

Anemone followed the Godmother upstairs. The King rose from the floor and huddled himself in a chair, nursing his frostbitten hand. The footman held his nose very high in the air and swaggered boldly past the silent King out into the kitchen to tell the other servants all about it.

Up the winding stair went the Godmother and into the Queen's chamber. There, in a beautiful bed, lay the Fairy Queen. By the side of the bed was a fragrant green cradle, made from the striped needles of the fir balsam. On the silken pillows, woven by the best spinner-spiders of the kingdom, sound asleep lay the little Princess. The old nurse nodded in her chair by the window. As the Godmother entered the room the nurse shivered and woke.

"Here she is," she cried, joyfully. "Queen-mother, here she is!"

The Wishing, Christening, Gift-giving Godmother leaned over the cradle and lifted the little Princess in her arms. Anemone started forward anxiously. She remembered the King's

frostbitten fingers, and she feared for the baby held so closely against the cold robe of snow.

But just then a wonderful thing happened. The snowy robe, on which rested the little Princess, turned a soft, warm pink, like the fleecy clouds at sunset. The white cheeks of the Godmother reflected the glow, and her eyes, which had sparkled so coldly on the angry King, were blue like the sky above the pink clouds.

The little Princess waked and laughed into the face of the Godmother. The Queen smiled contentedly from among her pillows. The old nurse no longer shivered, but looked on well pleased. Anemone was warm and happy. The baby patted the loving face bending over her, and Godmother kissed the pink fingers.

"Welcome, Godmother," said the Queen. "We have waited long for you, and your coming is the more welcome."

Godmother sat down beside the Queen. "I was delayed," she said, and her voice was no longer icy but made one think of the summer wind in the pines. "A playmate for the Princess kept me. He lies in the hollow stump by the sugar maple. His name is Grobbo, and I have wished his wish—that he may be faithful and

The little Princess waked and laughed into the face of the Godmother

true. His gift is the power to win laughter from all about him—to make the world brighter wherever he goes."

"He shall come to the castle to-morrow," cried the Queen, "and shall grow up with my little daughter. Nurse Faithful's arms are broad enough for two, are they not, Nurse?"

"Aye, that they are, Queen-mother, and e'en for your own sweet self besides."

"It is a crystal night," said Godmother. "As I came through the wood the beautiful ice glittered all about me. It was not purer than this little maid shall be. It is not more beautiful than she shall grow, nor is the snow whiter than the innocence of her heart. Little one, born on a crystal night, I name thee Princess Crystal!"

The King had crept softly up the stairs and was now listening at the crack of the door. When he heard this he shouted: "Crystal, indeed! That's no kind of a name! Who ever heard of a Princess being called Crystal?"

There is no telling how long he would have gone on blustering if Godmother had not looked at the door. As soon as she turned her eyes in his direction his teeth began to chatter so he could not say another word.

"And the gift, Godmother?" softly asked the Queen. "What gift do you bring my little daughter?"

"The gift of inspiring love and confidence in all—of chasing fear from the heart of the most timid creature that walks the broad earth, and filling that timorous heart with faith and love."

"It is indeed a rich gift, Godmother."

The King screamed through his chattering teeth, "And the w-w-w-wish—d-d-don't forget the w-w-w-wish!"

Godmother smiled as she laid the baby back in the cradle. "It is a very easy thing to wish for the Princess Crystal," she said. "I have only to wish that she may never inherit her father's disposition."

She went slowly from the room. As she passed the King on the winding stair she stopped and touched him with her cold hand. He stiffened instantly and stood like a snow man-at-arms guarding the landing.

Outside the castle the stars began to fade away. It grew very dark, then a faint gray glow appeared in the east. The sky overhead turned blue, a golden rift showed in the clouds and the great sun appeared.

The ice on the oak began to crack, then to melt. At the first crack all the fairies sleeping in their houses throughout the wood, awoke.

"Listen!" they cried. "The gun from the castle! Can it be that the Princess has come?"

The melting drops fell, like tinkling bells, from all the oak-leaf flags. Released, the banners waved in the morning wind. The tiny bells chimed through the Fairy Wood. The fairies shouted for joy and the news spread.

"The Princess!" they shouted. "The Princess! Long life to the Princess Crystal!"

As the sun rose higher the ice on the other trees, far below the top of the great oak, also sent forth the news: then the young trees took up the music, the shrubs, and finally every twig and dead leaf was ringing its merry chime, telling to each dweller in the Fairy Wood, far and near, that the Princess Crystal lay in her mother's arms, in the heart of the great white oak. Not a fairy, not a bird, not a field-mouse running beneath the snow but heard and understood.

And yet the Man, who went through the wood with his ax and dinner-pail, only said, "It thaws fast this morning!"

CHAPTER II

TRUE to her word, the Queen sent for Grobbo, and he became the friend and playmate of the little Princess. At first old Nurse Faithful took good care of the two babies, but soon they began to creep and run about. They learned to know every nook and cranny in the castle, and made friends with everyone. Fairies grow much faster than human beings, and in a few weeks Crystal and Grobbo were asking all sorts of questions, and trying with all their little might to learn everything in a very short time. Crystal was a dainty little thing, with yellow hair. Grobbo was fat and roly-poly, and always tumbling down. He had red cheeks and the merriest little face. No one could look at him without feeling comfortable and contented. His laugh was so cheery that it made anyone laugh in sympathy, and he soon became known as Gay Little Grobbo. They were not yet old enough to go to school,

as did the other fairy children, nor had they been out into the snowy world.

One day, just before dinner, the King came tearing down stairs in a great rage. "Columbine!" he called, "Columbine! Where is the rascal? Some robber is trying to break into the castle! I can hear him from my room, tapping—tapping. Call the guard! Columbine! Columbine, I say!" And he went roaring about, seeking Columbine, the captain of the guard.

He had not noticed Crystal and Grobbo playing on the stairs, but they had listened intently to every word. Now, with one mind, they scampered up to the very top of the castle and peered out from a loophole.

"I hear him," said Crystal. "What do you suppose it is?"

"I don't know," answered Grobbo, with one leg out. "I'm going to see."

"I'm going too."

"No, you stay here, and whatever it is, I'll bring it."

Crystal leaned far out of the opening, while Grobbo climbed carefully around the towers toward the curious sound. Soon the noise stopped, and he returned in great excitement.

"I've found him," he said; "he's coming."

There was a whirr of wings, and a fluffy Chickadee alighted on the roof outside the loophole, and hung, head down.

Crystal jumped, he was so big and came so suddenly; then she laughed, delighted.

"O, aren't you splendid!" she exclaimed, "with your black cap and your wings. I wish I had wings. They tell me if I'm good I'll have some some day, but they're a long while coming. Was it you tapping on our roof? What did you do it for? And who are you, anyway?"

The Chickadee ran around the tower before he answered. "I'm a Chickadee," he said, "and I was not hurting your roof. All hidden in it are tiny eggs that would hatch in the spring to grubs who would eat your roof. All winter long we Chickadees and our cousins, the Nuthatches, go through the woods, hunting and eating these eggs. We are really carpenters who preserve your houses for you. By the way, Grobbo, we found your old hollow-stump house in a frightful condition. I heard your father raging about, Princess, but you just tell him that if we didn't look out for his castle he might have to take off all this lovely natural-wood finish and put on clapboards. I'm sorry I disturbed

him, but the roof just over his head was very bad indeed." And Chickadee stood on his head again.

Grobbo watched his antics with great wonder, while Crystal said, "I don't see how you can hang with your head down like that."

"Pooh, that's nothing!" boasted Chickadee; "you ought to see my cousin, White-breasted Nuthatch—he could walk down the whole side

And Chickadee stood on his head again

of this castle, standing on his head. Hark!—I hear him calling now. I must go. Good-by. Come out some day and play with me."

Chickadee flew away, calling "Chickadee-dee-dee-dee," in answer to the "Ank-ank-ank" of his cousin.

Grobbo and Crystal looked at each other and gasped.

"I'll bet I could do it," said Grobbo, "if I tried."

He began to wriggle down the stairs on his stomach, head-first. The King dashed up, three steps at a time, followed by Columbine, gay in his red and yellow uniform, and a company of soldiers. Grobbo heard them coming, but could not get out of the way. The King tripped over him and fell sprawling, Columbine fell on the King, and the soldiers tumbled one above the other onto Columbine. In the hubbub which followed, Crystal and Grobbo vanished.

A few hours later the King and Queen were conferring on the state of the castle walls. Crystal had told them what Chickadee had said, and they had nearly decided to have the whole castle repaired, and to give the work to Chickadee himself as head carpenter. While they were talking Crystal slipped away and went quietly from room to room, calling under her breath, "Grobbo, Grobbo, where are you?"

A door which led down to the storeroom swung open and Grobbo's feet waved in the opening. He came slowly into view, red in the face and out of breath, but triumphant.

"I did it!" he cried, "I went down that whole flight of stairs head-first, and then I backed

up again. O, you wait till my wings grow. I'll beat that Chickadee yet!"

"Grobbo," said Crystal, "get your coat and let's go out and find him!"

"Why, you've never been out yet."

"I know, but I've looked out, and we won't go far. I'm all warm. I've borrowed Anemone's thistle-down cape."

Soon two tiny figures skimmed unseen over the snow-crust.

"My, aren't things big?" said Crystal. "Do you see him anywhere? It's kind of lonesome. I'd like to meet somebody."

"I'll climb up this high grass stalk and see what I can see," answered Grobbo. "O, there he is, and a lot more with him! But he's all covered with snow, I guess. He looks white. I'll bet they are playing hide-and-seek—let's go see!"

He scrambled down the grass stalk, and, taking Crystal's hand, ran swiftly toward the flock of birds.

"Hi, Chickadee, hi, let us play too," he shouted as he ran.

The birds turned at the sound and Crystal saw they were not like Chickadee.

"We are not Chickadees," they said. "We

are Snow Buntings, but come and play with us. We are not even related to the Chickadees—we belong to the Finch family. Our cousins, the Sparrows, will be here soon. Who are you, you tiny things?"

"This is the Princess Crystal, and I am Grobbo, her playmate," was the answer.

The flock of Buntings wheeled into the air and dropped again, one at a time. As each passed before the Princess he fluttered his wings and drooped his downy head.

"We have heard of you, Princess," they twittered, "from our mistress, your Godmother. We have instructions from her to care for you, and some day we will play with you again, but now you must let us take you back to the castle, for, see—the snowflakes are falling, and soon the whole wood will be full of the whirling, blinding snow, in which you might easily lose your way."

"But you," inquired the Princess, "can you find your way back again? Will not the snow overwhelm you?"

"O, Princess, we love it," they answered, "when the white flakes fly fastest, then are we happiest. We dance with them and hide in the whirling clouds; then when we are tired

we lie in the soft snow and it covers us while we sleep."

It was snowing fast now, and when Crystal turned to walk toward the castle her feet sank deep in the light flakes. As for Grobbo, he floundered hopelessly. At this moment a great bird passed, walking lightly over the soft snow. He spread his tail and saluted the Princess. She cried out in astonishment.

"There is old Grandfather Grouse, a thousand times bigger than I," she said, "and yet he walks the drifts without sinking, while I can scarce lift my tiny feet, I sink so deeply in the snow."

"He wears his snowshoes," explained a Bunting. "Has he never told you how in winter, a furry fringe of bristles grows between his toes, that spreads out as he walks and bears him on the snow? And when the snow is gone and he no longer needs them, the bristles disappear until another year?"

"I wish he would lend me an old pair," gasped Grobbo, as he lifted one heavy foot after the other.

"Get on my back and hold firm, and I will carry you," said the Bunting.

Crystal and Grobbo gladly climbed on the

Bunting's broad back. Swiftly he flew through the snowflakes, close to the ground, so close that they could see the Evergreen Wood-fern lying flat in the sheltered places where the snow had not drifted.

When they reached the castle there was a great commotion. The Queen and Anemone stood in the doorway, looking anxiously out into the storm. As the Bunting lit on the snow before the entrance, and Crystal and Grobbo slid from his back, the Queen cried, "Here they are! Search no longer! The Princess is safe! Thank you, kind bird, for bringing her home to us."

But the King, who came plunging through the snow, tired and wet, snarled angrily: "What do you mean by throwing all this snow about? Great, clumsy giant that you are, could you not be more careful?"

The Bunting made no reply, but as he rose to fly back to his companions he sent such a shower of snow at the angry King as knocked him down and rolled him over and over till he had no more breath wherewith to scold.

Every day, after this, the Princess and Grobbo played in the snow. When school was out the other fairy children would join them.

There were the three Violet girls—Wood Violet, Yellow Violet, and little White Violet. Pearly Everlasting was there, Hepatica, Star Flower, the Partridge Berry Twins, Buttercup, Daisy, and the Goldenrod sisters. There was short little Cinquefoil, who always presented his chubby back when the other boy fairies played leapfrog. There were Mouse-Ear and Hop Clover, and ever so many more besides.

One day they were all sitting in a long row on the castle steps when jolly Columbine came out.

"Why do you look so sober, children all?" he asked.

"O, Columbine," Crystal answered, "we don't know what to do. The snow is so slippery that we can't run about and play, and our wings are not grown, so we cannot fly. All we can do is to sit here like this, and we are so tired of it."

"No wonder," said Columbine. "Perhaps I can help you."

Now, Columbine had spurs on his feet, and wings besides, so he walked boldly out onto the shiny, slippery crust. When his foot slipped he fluttered his wings and went on bravely. He disappeared among the trees. The

children waited, wondering what he would do. Soon he reappeared—but such a queer looking Columbine! His red and yellow uniform was all hidden, and he himself bowed beneath the load he carried. Strips of birch-bark—O, so many of them!—he carried, and some he dragged behind him. When they saw him coming so laden all the boy fairies ran, slipping and sliding, to meet him, and tugged away at the heavy load. At the steps he threw the burden down, standing straight and stretching his wings.

"What is it? What is it? What are we going to do?" cried the children.

Columbine's eyes twinkled as he chose a long slender piece of bark. "Now, Princess, sit on this," he commanded.

Crystal took her seat.

"Hold on tight," he said, and gave her a mighty push.

Down, down the smooth slope she sped, bumping over the roots of the great oak, and out into the open space until she stopped at last in front of the stump by the sugar maple.

"Me next—me next!" cried all the little fairies, and Columbine pushed till his wing-blades ached again. Then he went into the

castle, and the children slid on the birch-bark sleds till dark.

As Crystal and Grobbo climbed the winding stairs that night after supper Crystal said: "It is a pretty world, and I like the snow, you can have so much fun in it; but is it always white like this? Sometimes when the snow melts I see brown leaves beneath, and once I saw a green fern."

Anemone, who was following to put them to bed, answered her: "It is only the winter world that you know, Princess. But soon the great sun will melt the snow and warm the cold, wet earth until all things deep below feel the warmth and, stirring in their sleep, push their way up to greet him. The trees will bloom, flowers and grass will grow, green leaves will fly over the castle, and spring will be here!"

"When will it come?" cried Crystal and Grobbo together, "O, we want the spring!"

"When you see the first Bluebird," replied Anemone, "with the earth on his breast and the sky on his back, then you may know that the spring is here!"

"How shall we know him?"

"O, you will know him, never fear! His song is the song of the spring, and it wakes an

echo in every heart. Everyone knows the Bluebird. Even the stupid Man, who passes the wood, knows him and stops to watch him as he flashes by."

Next morning when Crystal put on her dress she found she could not fasten it across her shoulders, so she ran to Nurse Faithful for help. Nurse stooped to see what the trouble was and gave a cry of surprise.

"Queen-mother, Queen-mother, look here!"

"O, what is it?" said Crystal, craning her neck to see.

The Queen looked and she too exclaimed in delight.

"Tell me what it is," begged Crystal, "please do."

"Why, it's your wings," said the nurse. "Here is one almost through. They will be out by noontime."

"She is a big girl now," said the Queen. "She must wear her wing-dresses. Anemone, bring the Princess's wardrobe."

When the new dress was on Crystal ran downstairs to find Grobbo and tell him the great news.

"You needn't feel so big about it," he replied, calmly. "I cut mine last night!"

Every morning after that the two children would measure each other's wings, and then run to the door to see if the Bluebird had come. Day after day they watched for him. The snow melted in great patches, and only in the cold, shady places could they use their birch-bark sleds.

One day they heard a faint, joyful sound high in the air above them. At the same time they felt strange flutterings at their hearts, and queer struggling pains where their tiny wings were beginning to grow.

"The Bluebird," whispered Crystal, and "The Bluebird," echoed Grobbo.

Then there dashed past them Lady Bluebird herself, pale and faintly colored, but behind her—pursuing—came her lord and master in all the glory of his courting finery. Deep and rich was his blue coat, and gay his reddish vest, and as Crystal and Grobbo saw his gorgeous wings when he flew swiftly by, they shouted: "The spring has come! The spring has come! We have seen the Bluebird!"

CHAPTER III

WHEN Crystal and Grobbo told the other children that they had seen the Bluebird, Hepatica and little Star Flower cried out with delight. "School will soon be over now," they sang, "and then we can begin our work. Pussy Willow and her sisters have been busy a long time. And big, rough Skunk Cabbage hasn't been to school for ever so many days. We don't miss him, though—he is so disagreeable. But perhaps his work makes him so."

"Work? What is work?" asked Crystal and Grobbo with one voice.

"Why, don't you know?" exclaimed the children, and they all talked at once so no one could understand a word.

"Wait," commanded Crystal. "Let some one speak alone. Hepatica, you tell us."

"O, work is something so nice, so much better than stupid old school. You know, the snow is nearly gone now, and the earth is not hard any more, but moist and soft. Away down

under the ground are all kinds of flowers—beautiful things whose names we bear—waiting for the ice and snow to melt, for the gentle spring rains to come, for the warm sun to shine on them, but, more than all, for their good friends, the flower fairies, to help them climb, climb, up through the earth, and to send their roots deep into the ground, and to spread their green leaves and bring forth buds and flowers to make the world beautiful."

"What are buds and flowers?" demanded Crystal.

"What are roots?" asked Grobbo.

"There are many kinds of buds and flowers," answered Hepatica, "as many as there are fairies. They do not all come at once, nor do they all grow on the same kinds of plants. The first are the Pussy Willows, and that is the reason why Pussy and all her little sisters have not been to school. They have been flying from one twig to another, helping the Pussies to split their shiny brown coats, and smoothing their soft, gray fur. That is their work. As our own flowers come along we all have our work to do, to help them in every way. We care for them from the time that the tiny shoots push through the earth until the

seeds are scattered. Some of us, like Arbutus and myself, work early: others, like Buttercup and Daisy, work in the hot summer sun, while Clematis, Aster, and Goldenrod have their busy time in the autumn, and Witch Hazel is the last of all."

"O," breathed Crystal, "when do the Crystal flowers come? I'm so anxious to work!"

"And the Grobbo flowers—where are they? I hope they are red and yellow, like Columbine."

The children looked at each other. Tiny White Violet began to cry.

"I never heard of any Crystal and Grobbo flowers. I don't believe there are any," she sobbed.

Crystal and Grobbo were very grave for a minute; then Grobbo laughed.

"Of course there must be," he said. "If there are flowers for all of you to tend, there must be something for us to work for too. Only we haven't found it yet. But we will, and if we can't do it alone, we'll ask Godmother."

"Well, anyway," chirped the cheerful little Partridge Berry Twins, "you can try your wings with the rest of us. We were just going to begin when you came. Nobody can work

till he can fly. and if you are all ready, probably you'll find something to do. Our wings have been quivering all the morning, and yours are beginning now."

Grobbo twisted his head round and moved his wings as fast as he could, but nothing happened. All the other children tried very hard, but no one succeeded except Hepatica, who really flew a tiny bit.

A Yellow-edge Butterfly sailed slowly through the wood, and sank gently onto a stump. "Climb up on something and jump off," he said. "You'll soon learn that way."

Grobbo shouted with glee and scrabbled up a dried fern stalk, which broke and sent him, head over heels, to the ground. He jumped to his feet and climbed more carefully onto a rock. He stood a moment on the edge until all the children were looking at him, then leaped boldly off, fluttering his wings with all his might. And away he sailed in the air, over the heads of the other children, the proudest little fairy you can imagine!

"O, it's fine!" he cried, "and just as easy. Come on, Princess."

All the boy fairies scrabbled up the rock in a crowd and jumped off as fast as they could:

then the fat little Partridge Berry Twins crawled up hand in hand, and leaped with a little shriek. When the girls saw them floating in the air they all followed, but Crystal was afraid. Her white, lacy wings trembled, and she called, "Grobbo, Grobbo, come back and help me!"

But Grobbo was racing with the Yellow-edge Butterfly and did not hear her, and all the rest

The fat little Partridge Berry Twins crawled up hand in hand and leaped with a little shriek

were so busy and so proud that they forgot all about their Princess. Just then a great robin flew scolding through the wood, swooping down into the bushes over her head, and she was so frightened that she ran up the rock and jumped before she had time to think. She fluttered her wings and rose higher and higher. Up, up she went, all her fears gone, flying slowly around the trunk of a maple tree. Sud-

denly a little voice called her, and she saw a butterfly sipping at the sweet sap which trickled from a hole that Downy Woodpecker had drilled in the bark.

"Come and share my breakfast," he said.

She alighted on a branch and drank some of the sap, for she was tired. Suddenly she realized that she was far from the ground and her playmates, and at that moment she heard Schoolmaster Owl ringing the bell, far away at the school.

"O," she cried, "I forgot all about school. Where is Grobbo? I don't believe I know where I am. What shall I do?"

Butterfly coiled up his tongue and put it away neatly before he spoke. "Get on my back and I'll take you to school. I know where it is."

So Crystal sat between his soft downy wings and away he flew to the hollow tree where Master Owl taught the little fairies, arriving just as Grobbo and the others were trooping into school.

The schoolroom was very dark, as Master Owl's eyes could not bear the light, but that did not bother the fairies because they can see almost as well in the dark as in the light.

The blackboards were pieces of charred wood that came from the dead fires in the sugar-maple grove, and all the little fairies wrote their lessons with bits of fox-fire that grows on dead wood and glows in the dark. They sat on mushrooms that grew in the hollow tree, and when a new scholar came Master Owl planted a mushroom spore and soon the seat was ready. All the scholars had to be very, very good because the hollow tree was so dark, and Master Owl's eyes were made to see in just such dark places. Poor Owl—he could not see in the light at all!

Grobbo's lessons were very poor to-day, and as for Crystal, she could not answer one single question. They both had to stay after school while Master Owl wrote notes to the King. He sat before his high desk, scowling severely, dipping his quill pen deep into the ink-cap mushroom that stood by his side, and scratching fiercely as he wrote. When the notes were done he gave them to Crystal and Grobbo, saying, "Go straight home now. Do not loiter on the way. And give these at once to the King."

The King was very angry and scolded a great deal, but after it was all over and he

had slammed the door behind them as they went out—you see, he was an exceedingly rude King—Crystal said: "It doesn't make any difference what *anybody* says, Grobbo. We must go to work."

"That's so," agreed Grobbo, his chubby little face very serious, "but how can we work when we have to go to school?"

"We can't, and as long as there is a school, we shall have to go. So we must break up the school."

"Break up the school!" exclaimed Grobbo, in horror. "Then Master Owl would send Truant Officer Kingfisher after us. He came the other day, you know. I heard his rattle."

"Bother old Kingfisher! You aren't afraid of him, are you?"

Grobbo was dreadfully afraid of him, but he didn't want to let a girl know it, so he said very loudly, "Of course not." And then he wasn't quite so much afraid.

"If I'll do it all myself, will you just come along too?"

Grobbo puffed out his cheeks, put his hands in his pockets, and said carelessly, "O, yes, I'll go with you."

But all the time he was thinking of Truant

Officer Kingfisher and his awful rattle, and saying hopefully to himself, "She's only a girl—perhaps she can't do it!"

The next day he saw Crystal talking earnestly to Chickadee, and heard him shout as he flew away: "Downy will do it. He was looking for a new tree yesterday, and perhaps he will bring his big cousin Hairy with him."

Later, as Master Owl was calling the roll, saying "Whoo? Whoo? Whoo?" and all the scholars were answering, something flew against the schoolroom walls, landing with a great jar that shook the mushroom seats. A moment after there was another heavier jar, and then began such a hammering and pounding that no one could hear Master Owl calling to the frightened scholars. Bloodroot, Violet, and Star Flower huddled together in a corner, the Partridge Berry Twins hid under their seat, and Grobbo ran to protect Crystal. He found her close to the wall with her face hidden in her hands. When he tried to comfort her she turned to him, and he saw she was not crying but laughing.

"It's happening now," she whispered. "Be ready to follow me. There won't be any school in a minute."

Suddenly the whole outside wall gave way, and crashed in onto the mushroom seats

Master Owl was flying wildly about, shouting fiercely "Whoo, Whoo? Whoo?" but the hammering continued and nobody answered. Suddenly the whole outside wall gave way, and crashed in onto the mushroom seats. Two sharp bills showed for an instant in the opening. The fairies were all crouching at the farther side of the room, so no one was hurt, but when the bright daylight streamed into the dark room poor Master Owl became just like a blind man.

Downy Woodpecker poked in his head, shouting, "Princess, Princess, here's your hole—come along!"

Crystal darted toward the opening, crying: "Don't be afraid. It's only dear old Downy and his cousin, Hairy. They have spoiled the schoolhouse so we can't have any more school, and now we can hunt for Crystal and Grobbo flowers! Come, everybody!"

She flew away, followed by Grobbo and the flowers who had not yet begun to work.

Now, Master Owl, although he could not see anything, could still hear, and he was a very wise bird.

"O—O —" he wailed, flying up and down behind his desk. "It is a plot to break up

my school! The King shall hear of this. Where is Truant Officer Kingfisher? O, if I could only see! O, if I only had some one I could send to Kingfisher!"

"I'll go, Master," came a husky voice from the corner. It was sneaky Skunk Cabbage, who had done his work so poorly that even the Man who went through the wood had noticed it, and said to Little Son John, trotting beside him, "The skunk cabbages are mighty few and far between this year." Skunk Cabbage had been sent back to school as a punishment, and when all the other scholars flew away with Crystal and Grobbo he had stayed behind, hoping for just such a chance as this.

"Go—go, Skunk Cabbage, go at once!" cried blind and helpless Master Owl. "Kingfisher will be sitting on the dead branch that overhangs the lake by the village."

It was a long fly, but at last Skunk Cabbage sank wearily onto the dead branch and told his story, while Kingfisher sat and listened and watched the cold water of the lake for his dinner.

"Master Owl says they must all be brought back," concluded Skunk Cabbage, "but first, you are to catch the ringleaders, the Princess Crystal and Grobbo, who are mischief-makers

and at the bottom of the whole plot. If they were his children—"

Kingfisher did not wait to hear the ending of Master Owl's remarks, but flew at once toward the fairy woods, ruffling up his crest and rattling fiercely.

Crystal and Grobbo, in the woods, heard him coming, and flew lower, fluttering cautiously from bush to bush.

Suddenly Crystal stopped and darted back to the shelter of a fern. "Look," she whispered.

Grobbo peered out and saw, in the snowy wood road, the Man who often went through the fairy woods, dragging Little Son John on a sled. "That's the Man," explained Grobbo. "He won't hurt us. You aren't afraid of a man, are you?"

"He's awfully big," quavered Crystal. "Is that a little Man on that funny thing he's dragging after him?"

"That's Little Son John—I've heard the Man call him so. And that funny thing, as you call it, is only a sled, like the ones Columbine made for us when the snow was slippery."

"O," said Crystal.

Kingfisher's rattle had grown faint in the distance, so they flew on, looking everywhere

for some strange thing that might be a Crystal or a Grobbo flower. When they came to the cascade they found it leaping merrily over the rocks, but below, in the shadow, the ice lingered on the edge of the brook. Kneeling on the bank, they could see the lazy Caddis Worms among the stones under the transparent ice.

"Why, that one's moving!" cried Grobbo.

"Of course I'm moving, you stupid thing," replied Caddis, glaring angrily up at him. "Do you think you great earth dwellers are the only people who can move? What should you think if you had to carry your house with you wherever you went, as I do? You might claim some credit for moving about then."

"Is that curious tube of sticks your house?" inquired Crystal.

"It certainly is," answered Caddis; "and I made it all myself. My brother over there has used stones for his house, but I preferred a wooden one."

"I should think dragging your house about with you would be very hard," remarked Grobbo. "It would be for us."

"It's rather handy at times," answered Caddis. "When any fish comes along to eat me, or when I'm tired talking to stupid people, I can simply

retire—like this." And Caddis backed into his house and shut the door behind him!

"I don't believe that's our work—helping them," said Crystal. "My knees are almost frozen, just kneeling here to watch them, and they don't appreciate us at all."

Flying back from the brook, they found Hepatica hard at work among the dead leaves by the side of the road.

"I've found a new clump," she exclaimed, joyfully, "and they have promised to try their hardest to grow and spread. Aren't they lovely, the dear things? See their fuzzy stems, and the little flowers, all white and pink and purple. But why are you out of school at this time of day?"

Crystal and Grobbo explained with many a laugh, but Hepatica did not think it was at all funny.

"That was very wrong," she said, sadly. "You have spoiled your nice schoolroom, because a broken tree can never be mended, and you have hurt poor Master Owl's eyes. You, Crystal, who ought to be loving and kind, and you, too, Grobbo, whose Godmother's wish was that you should make others happy—you ought to be ashamed! Whatever your work may be,

you will know it when it is time for you to do it. We all know that. When I begin my work in the cold March winds, Dandelion and Daisy do not rush into the fields and try to pull up their flowers. They know it is not yet time, and if their flowers came too early, the night frosts would kill them. You should wait and watch for your work patiently, and when the time comes you will know."

Crystal and Grobbo flew up the hilly road, feeling quite ashamed. By and by they saw Little Son John trying to slide on his sled. But the open road on the hill was nearly bare, and he had to drag the sled over long muddy stretches to get even a little slide on the shady spots where the sun had not yet melted the snow.

"Come on," said Grobbo, as Crystal hesitated. "He won't hurt you."

At that moment, close over their heads, sounded the loud, triumphant rattle of Truant Officer Kingfisher! He had seen them, and was sure he had them. But Grobbo snatched Crystal's hand and flew straight to Little Son John, alighting on the front of his red coat.

Little Son John looked at the lovely shimmering creatures clinging to his coat. "Butterflies," he said, slowly. "Butterflies in winter!" and he

lifted his hand to stroke them. Just then something happened that caused Little Son John to sit down very suddenly on his sled, and cease all attempts at stroking these astonishing butterflies. For one of them was talking!

"Little Son John," said Grobbo's wee voice, "we are not butterflies, although we have wings. This is Crystal, the Fairy Princess, and I am Grobbo, her playmate. We have been very naughty in school, and Truant Officer Kingfisher is chasing us. You won't let him get us, will you?"

Mr. Kingfisher, who had been listening with all his ears, now swooped fiercely at Little Son John, and Crystal and Grobbo cowered in terror. Brave Little Son John pulled off his red stocking cap and shook it at terrible Truant Officer Kingfisher, shouting, "Scat—scat—scat!" And old Mr. Kingfisher flew away in a panic.

"Thank you, great, brave Little Son John," said Crystal. "You have saved us from Truant Officer Kingfisher, but now where can we go? We are on our way to find work, and we are very sure that there is no work at home for us just now. Our wings are not very strong yet, and we have flown far and are tired. Where can we rest?"

"Well," said Little Son John, "you can come and sleep at my house all night. There is a humming bird's nest in the sitting-room bookcase that my Daddy discovered with his sharp eyes, and when all the humming birds were gone he chopped the tree down and brought the nest home, and you can sleep in that. It's awful soft inside."

"O, that will be splendid!" exclaimed Crystal and Grobbo.

"I'll cover you all up with my red mitten now, and we'll go right along home, and I'll tell Daddy and Mother that you're goin' to spend the night with us."

"Is the Man that goes through the wood Daddy?" inquired Grobbo.

"Yup," replied John. "Now we're goin' home."

John clambered up the hill, one red-mittened hand protecting the fairy children, the other dragging the sled, until they came to a big white house with great trees in front of it.

"I hope it isn't noisy," said Grobbo, peeping out between John's thumb and finger; "fairies don't like noise."

"Daddy and Mother are pretty quiet," replied John, "and I am sometimes. I'll try to be

real quiet all the time you're visitin' with us."

He left the sled at the shed door and went into the kitchen, where his mother was frying plum doughnuts.

"Mother," he whispered, "I've caught two fairies. A kingfisher was chasin' 'em. He's the

John clambered up the hill, one red-mittened hand protecting the fairy children, the other dragging the sled

fairies' truant officer, and they're goin' to stay here all night—in Daddy's humming bird's nest."

"Very well," said Mother, who was used to John's make-believes, and who did not know there were any fairies. John ran in the sitting room and put Crystal and Grobbo into the soft nest.

When Daddy came in from his work to have a doughnut, John told him, and he went in the sitting room and looked at the nest.

"See 'em? See 'em, Daddy?" questioned John, eagerly.

Daddy nodded, for his sharp eyes could tell fairies from butterflies at a glance, and he had seen Grobbo turn and look at him, and heard him say to Crystal, who nestled close to him, "It's only Mr. Daddy-man; he won't hurt us. He has nice eyes and can see all the things he wants to."

"We must be awful quiet," whispered John. "He told me fairies don't like noise."

Toby-cat stalked into the room.

"Shoo," yelled John. "Shoo, you Toby-cat! Get a million miles away!"

Toby-cat ran and John clattered after. When he came back Daddy said, "I guess Son John is the one to remember to be quiet."

"Well, sir," said Little Son John, "that was a helping noise, and they knew it. Toby-cat might have seen 'em, and thought they were butterflies and gobbled 'em all down—bodies and feathers and fur! That's his usual custom!"

CHAPTER IV

ROBBO waked in the morning to find Crystal's bright eyes looking earnestly at him.

"We must go straight back home, Grobbo," she said solemnly, "and tell them we are sorry we broke the schoolhouse, but that we can't go to school any longer, and they must find us some work."

"Yes," agreed Grobbo, "I think so too, but we might wait to bid Little Son John good-by."

Although it was very early they soon heard him in the room above, and in a few minutes his stout little boots came clattering down the stairs. "What a lot of noise he makes!" said Grobbo. "I'm glad we don't wear shoes like that."

"Yes, but he is a nice child."

At the door John remembered that fairies did not like noise, so he tiptoed into the room and peeked into the humming bird's nest. He

was half afraid it had been all a dream, but there were Crystal and Grobbo sitting on the edge of the nest, and smoothing each other's wings.

"Good-morning, Little Son John," said Crystal.

"Good-morning, Little Son John," said Grobbo.

"Good-morning," said John, politely. "I hope you rested well."

"We did, thank you, in this lovely nest; but now we must fly home and tell them we are sorry that we were naughty."

"What will your Daddy and your Mother do to you?" asked John. "When I'm bad my Mother puts me in the back room, but when I say I'm sorry she lets me come out."

"I don't know," replied Crystal; "but I think we must go now."

"You haven't had any breakfast."

"We shall have some at the castle."

"I wish you wouldn't go. I'd like to have you come again."

"We surely will, dear Little Son John; and sometimes when you are playing in the woods and fields, if you walk very softly and look very sharply at the flowers, you may see us

or our companions. We shall see you again. And now please open the door and let us fly away."

John pushed open the big door, and watched them flying toward the woods. As they went swiftly in the direction of the great oak they noticed a commotion in the wood. Far away Pussy Willow and her sisters were flying swiftly about, Water Cress was running up and down the brook, and low on the earth Skunk Cabbage was skulking about, pretending to look among the dead leaves. Crossbills and Juncos were hurrying about among the trees, but it was their old friend Chickadee who spied them first and spread the news.

"O, I see—see—see," he called. "Hunt no more—more—more!" and then sang again and again, "Safe—safe—safe—" as he flew by their side to the castle.

Tired and hungry, Crystal and Grobbo were soon safe in the great audience chamber.

"My!" whispered Grobbo to Crystal, "they have been hunting for us all night—look at Columbine and the soldiers."

Crystal saw more than the muddy uniforms of the Royal Guard. She saw the Queen-mother wiping her red eyes, and the King, her

father, shaking with rage as he sat on his throne. She saw poor old Master Owl in a dark corner, blinking his injured eyes behind some great blue spectacles, and beside him Truant Officer Kingfisher, ruffling up the feathers on his head, but not daring to rattle in the audience chamber. She saw all the runaway scholars, sitting meekly in rows, all but Skunk Cabbage, who stood beside Master Owl and handed him fresh wet handkerchiefs to cool his eyes. But she saw too the Wishing, Christening, Gift-giving Godmother seated at the King's right hand, and she was glad, for she knew that Godmother would understand and would set things right.

As Crystal and Grobbo came into the chamber a great clamor arose.

"Whoo—whoo—whoo!" hooted Master Owl. "There they are! They have spoiled my nice, dark schoolroom. It is all a glare of blinding light, and—"

"I did! I did!" squealed Skunk Cabbage. "I saw them do it. I heard the Princess telling those meddlesome Woodpeckers to—"

"They have destr-r-r-royed the r-r-r-royal pr-r-r-roperty," rattled Kingfisher, "and they must—"

"What does this mean?" raged the King,

jumping up and down and holding his crown on with both hands. "Why does my daughter tear down schoolhouses and spend the night in the wood? I'll—I'll—"

Then Godmother arose. Her robe was no longer of frost crystals, but was blue like the spring sky, and her mantle was fleecy and white like the little clouds that the west wind drives at noontime. She stretched out her hands and silence fell over the Court.

"We all know what these children have done," she said. "Now let us hear why they did it."

Crystal looked at Grobbo, who stepped forward and spoke.

"I don't think we meant any harm," he said. "We heard all our playmates talking about their work and the good times they had doing it, yet no one seemed to know of any for us. We wanted to look for some, but we couldn't while there was school, so we just did this so there couldn't be any more school."

"But we never thought it would hurt anyone," cried Crystal, in distress, looking at poor old Master Owl, who was still wiping his eyes with the handkerchiefs Skunk Cabbage passed him. "O, I'm so sorry we've hurt anybody!" She ran to her mother and hid her face in her lap.

"So," shouted the King to Grobbo, "you got my daughter to run away to find work, did you? *My* daughter shall never work, I tell you!" and he started angrily toward Grobbo, who stood silent.

Godmother touched the King's feet lightly with her wand. "King," she said, "did you notice you were walking in the cold brook water?"

Everybody stood up and stretched their necks to see, and sure enough, there about the King's ankles was streaming and swirling a nice, cold little spring rill, with icicles at the edges.

"O—O—O—O!" screamed the King, hopping up and down, but not able to move from the water. "O, it's so cold! O Godmother, dear, take it away."

"Be quiet, then," said Godmother, touching the stream, which sank out of sight.

"It is right, my children," she continued, "for you to want to work, but you did not go about it in the right way. Hepatica told you the truth when you met her by the side of the road." (Hepatica looked at Godmother in wonder that she should know what was said.) "However, as Master Owl's eyes are now well

again"—Master Owl suddenly found he could see perfectly well without his blue glasses—"and when Truant Officer Kingfisher finds that old Father Flicker has leased the schoolhouse just as it stands for his summer home, and since all the children are safe and sound and sorry, perhaps we have all learned our lesson. Bluebird has told me that the spring is coming early this year, so all the flower fairies will have a great deal to do and there will be no time for any more school. I am sure Master Owl and Mr. Kingfisher are thinking of building their summer homes too, and they will be glad to be relieved from their duties."

"I tell you I won't have my daughter work," shouted the King.

"You've stepped in the brook again," said Godmother. "You should be more careful." The water had appeared again, rushing about the King's silk stockings.

"Anyway, I won't have her work with Grobbo!" he cried, splashing about.

Then Crystal raised her head from her mother's lap and spoke:

"Why, father," she said, "Grobbo didn't do anything. Did you think it was Grobbo's fault? I did it all—he only followed me to

take care of me, when I said I would go. And when Kingfisher was nearly catching us, Grobbo was so brave. He flew with me right to Little Son John, a great boy-man, who scared Kingfisher away, and took us to his house, and we slept in a humming bird's nest all night. And the great big Daddy-man came and looked at us, and *he* saw us, but the Mother-lady didn't believe we were there."

The King looked at Crystal with the tears on her cheeks, at Grobbo waiting, straight and still, at the Godmother, and then at the icy water in which he was standing.

"O, do as you think best," he said, crossly, and the stream sank away.

"Children," said Godmother, "you shall learn the work of all your playmates. Crystal shall help Arbutus, all the little Violets, fat little Cinquefoil here, the slender Bluets, and the jolly Dandelions, while Grobbo shall watch for the blooms of the Shadbush, Rhodora, the gay Marsh Marigold, Pitcher Plant, and Jack-in-the-Pulpit—"

"He's my cousin—I want to help him," interrupted Skunk Cabbage.

"No," sternly replied Godmother, "you are a sneak. I know why you told Master Owl

what you did. You were sent back to school for shirking your work. But—yes, you shall help Jack-in-the-Pulpit, and he shall preach you a sermon every day, and perhaps next year you may be a better fairy. Then Grobbo shall help Columbine too—he shall learn to drill the Bee Brigade which escorts the Queen Bee to her new palace, and the Wasp Reserves, who build the paper forts that defend the outposts of the kingdom."

By this time Grobbo and Crystal were dancing about with delight, the King had warmed his feet, and everyone was happy but Skunk Cabbage, who was crying in a corner and using all Master Owl's handkerchiefs.

"Now," said the Queen, "I hear the Royal Society of Spring Peepers practicing in the marsh. Shall we not call them in and have some music and dancing? Our dear Godmother has made us so happy after our night of sorrow. And I think she will stay, so that to-morrow we may have the Ceremony of the Beginning of Work."

Godmother promised, and Columbine was sent to summon the orchestra; and then all the Court, young and old, danced and danced. The Queen danced with Grobbo, and the King

danced with Godmother, and Crystal danced with everyone in turn. All were happy but Skunk Cabbage, who was not allowed to dance at all, but had to turn the music for the leader of the band.

The next morning the Court Herald summoned all the fairies to the castle for the Ceremony of the Beginning of Work. A white throne had been placed beside those of the King and Queen, and Godmother sat there in a beautiful new robe of light spring green. Beside her stood Crystal, her wings quivering with eagerness. Far down the great hall stretched the lines of fairies in their many-colored robes, and their wings shimmered and shone in the morning light with all the tints of the rainbow. They were all there, from soft gray Pussy Willow, with wings like mist, in the front row, to yellow-haired Witch Hazel, with her sunny wings, standing tall in the background.

When all had assembled Columbine stepped forward, and behind him marched Grobbo, very proud in his new Guard's uniform of red and yellow.

"Prepare for the wing drill," commanded Columbine.

Each pair of wings was straightened and held

The drill over, Columbine stepped back to his place at the head of the Guards, and Godmother arose. "Guardians of the Tree-Buds," she called

motionless; then, at Columbine's orders, they flashed and fluttered till the whole hall was a blinding mass of color. The drill over, Columbine stepped back to his place at the head of the Guards, and Godmother arose.

"Guardians of the Tree-Buds," she called, and a company of fairies with wings of dusky pink and soft green, marched up to the throne. Sugar Maple and Red Maple stood side by side, their thick, strong wings almost touching Ash and Linden behind them. Next came Buttonwood, wearing her headdress of button balls; Elm, White Oak, Apple in her pinky-white cap, and Butternut. All the other trees were there, each wearing his distinctive cap, ready and waiting to begin his work.

"Go forth to your work," she commanded. "The spring is upon us. Your buds are calling you. Do your work faithfully and well, that the trees may bless mankind. This year your Princess goes among you to learn of you. When she flies high among the treetops guard her well, and show her the mystery of opening bud and flower. And now, go forth." The wings flashed a salute and the Tree Fairies left the hall.

"Guardians of the first Spring Flowers," called Godmother, and all of Crystal's play-

mates marched to the front of the hall. Arbutus, Star Flower, White Violet, Bloodroot, and the Bluets were among this company; and they stood before her, waving their pink and purple and white wings, nodding and smiling at her in friendly greeting.

"Your playmate is your Princess, remember," said Godmother. "When she flutters among the grasses show her your fragrant flowers and see that no harm comes to her. Away now, for your charges are calling you."

The Spring Flower Fairies flitted from the hall.

Troop after troop marched forward to receive their message from Godmother, and declare their allegiance to Princess Crystal; the Guardians of the Summer Flowers from wood and swamp, from roadside and field, led by proud little Cinquefoil, with Dandelion, Buttercup, Johnswort, and the yellow flowers of the summer and fall, with tall Goldenrod and Witch Hazel bringing up the rear. As they passed and saluted, the hall was full of sunshine from their yellow wings.

After all had gone Godmother led Crystal out from the castle, across the wood road, to a spot where a great rock stood in a patch of sunshine, surrounded by the sturdy green leaves

of the Trailing Arbutus. All about the rock hovered the pink and white Arbutus fairies, and they greeted Crystal with soft little cries of welcome. Those who were busy under the leaves, coaxing the buds to bloom, came out to listen to what Godmother was saying.

"Crystal," said she, "I have brought you first to Arbutus and her sisters to begin your work. Many of them you have never seen, because all through the winter while you have been in school they have been tending the buds which form in the fall, and lie all winter under the warm carpet of the snow. Besides, they are very shy, but they do their work so lovingly and so well that you could have no better teachers. When you are through with them and their blossoms they will show you where to go next."

Godmother flew away, and soon Crystal was working eagerly under their directions, hunting for the tiny green buds under the dead leaves, telling them where to turn to meet the sun, kissing fragrance into them, and loving them so dearly that all their pale, white flowers turned pink with pleasure and grew into rosy blossoms, and never before were the May-flowers so large and so beautiful as they were that spring.

CHAPTER V

NOW began the busiest time of the fairies' year. School was over and Master Owl was spending all his time trying to find a new house. Chickadee was roving through the wood, and even Truant Officer Kingfisher forgot all his naughty children, for Mrs. Kingfisher had come back from her winter vacation and was spring-cleaning the house in the sand-bank by the lake. The house was so very dirty and there was so much to do that she and Mr. Kingfisher had to eat their meals on the piazza, which was quite convenient because the piazza overhung the lake, and he could sit on the railing till a fish swam by, then dive after it and bring it directly to the table.

All the fairies flew away early in the morning to watch their buds and flowers, and even those whose plants would not bloom u til later had to go too to see that the roots were growing strong and deep. Crystal and Grobbo

had long ago learned that there were no Crystal and Grobbo flowers, but there was so much else for them to do that they did not care. Crystal flew home to the castle every night, tired and sleepy, but very happy, for her flowers were growing all through the wood, and she had already heard the Man telling Little Son John that he had never seen the spring flowers so large and so plentiful.

Grobbo was very busy too, so that Crystal did not see him as often as she used to. He was growing to be a big fairy now, and was a member of the Royal Guard. Every day he went with Columbine to the flowering trees where the bees gathered pollen, and listened while Columbine drilled the Bee Brigade. The Bee Brigade worked all summer, storing the winter supply of honey in the Royal Storehouse, a hollow tree not far from the castle. At first Grobbo was rather afraid of the bees' sharp stings, but he soon became friendly with them, and when Columbine wished to send a message by him Grobbo would carry a load of pollen himself, flying in the midst of the bees, pushing them from their course and frolicking and playing with them all the way.

The early butterflies were out now, and they

must be drilled for their part in the Midsummer Festival. There were the great Yellow Swallow-tails that would draw the royal chariot, the beautiful Banded Purples that drew the ladies-in-waiting, and all the little common yellow and white butterflies that drew the rest of the Court. Then too there were the night moths that

It was a great treat for the fairy children to . . . sit up late in the evening and watch Lieutenant Primrose commanding the . . . Luna Moths

would be waiting on the beach across the lake to bring the merrymakers home. Evening Primrose drilled the night moths, and it was a great treat for the fairy children to be allowed to sit up late in the evening and watch Lieutenant Primrose in his light-yellow uniform, commanding the company of beautiful pale-green Luna Moths which were to escort the Princess.

The Fairy Queen was busy too. Day after day she went from room to room in the castle, looking over the stores of silk that the spinner spiders wove, and deciding how much they must make during the summer. The spiders wove all the fairy dresses, all the uniforms, and, in fact, every bit of silk that was used at the castle. It was all white and glistening when they brought it to the Queen, and she colored it with dyes from the rainbow. Every time the sun came out after a shower the Queen hurried to the end of the rainbow and dipped the pieces of silk into the pot of gold that holds the colors. Then she took it back to the spiders, who sewed it into fairy dresses and robes.

So, you see, everyone was busy but the King. His only duty was to be King, and that wasn't enough to keep him busy in an empty castle, with everyone else away at work. Now, he had always seen the fairies working every spring, and never thought very much about it, but when he had a little daughter of his own he thought she ought not to work. He wanted her to sit beside him on the throne and just be a Princess, because he thought his daughter was a great deal better than anybody else's daughter. But Crystal was such a loving

little thing that she had to be out among fairies and flowers and birds. The King did not like it at all, and so he sat all day long, alone in the castle, sulking, and when Crystal and the other fairies flew home at night, laughing and chattering about their work, he would say, dreadfully cross and loud, "Stop your noise!"

You see, his manners were getting worse and worse. At last he could not stand it any longer. So, one day, he sat all day without moving or speaking or eating, just thinking and thinking, and getting crosser and crosser, and when bedtime came he wouldn't move or answer when they spoke to him, so they all went to bed and left him there. After everything was quiet he got up and tiptoed out of the castle.

"I'll—stop—her—work!" he said, under his breath.

He thought he was all alone in the wood when he crept softly over the moss and pine needles, but Busybody Bat flew behind him all the way. Now, flower buds are just like people —some of them try hard to be big, handsome flowers, while some are lazy and like to have their work done for them. The King knew this, so he went creeping from plant to plant, hunt-

ing for the lazy buds and whispering to them, telling them what hard work it was to blossom, and that no one would see them in the great wood anyway, and it really wasn't any use to take all that trouble for nothing. This was just the kind of advice the lazy buds liked, and it made them more lazy still; so they gladly promised him not to open at all, and he hurried back to the castle ever so pleased. He thought that if her flowers did not bloom, Crystal would be discouraged and give up her work, and be willing to sit on the throne beside him all day long. Now Busybody Bat listened to all he said, and then went home to his house under the eaves of the church and hung himself up by the hooks on his wings to wonder what he should do.

When Crystal visited her flowers again she was grieved to find so many small, poor buds. She could not understand it, and there was no one she could ask, because Grobbo was away with a new company of bees, and Godmother had not been seen for a long time.

"I can't think what it means," she said aloud.

"What—what—what—what's the matter now?" came a sweet little cry from a nearby

locust tree, and Song Sparrow flew down at her side.

"The flowers have all stopped blooming," she replied, "and they say they don't want to try any more. I don't know what can have happened."

"Noise—noise—noise—heard a noise last night! Scold—scold—scold—scolding all the time! Bat—bat—bat—Busybody Bat—flying all the night! Busybody Bat—Busybody Bat—he knows—he knows—ask him!" And Song Sparrow flew away.

Crystal told Grobbo at supper time, and when it was dark they went out to find Busybody Bat. He told them all about it, and volunteered to find Godmother and tell her. She came next day and found the King sulking in the castle. He had tried to get Jack-in-the-Pulpit not to bloom, but Jack had been so indignant he had preached him a long sermon right then and there. Now Godmother preached him another, and said, besides: "You are a wicked King, to try to undo your daughter's work. Since you plot when you are idle, you shall work yourself and have no time for mischief, but you shall not work in the sunlight with the others. When night comes you shall

fly through the wood and tend Nettle, Thistle, and the Poison Ivy. Busybody Bat shall fly behind to see you do not shirk, and report to me each day. This shall you do till the Midsummer Revels, and then we shall see." The King tried to beg off, but Godmother would not change her decree, and she sent him right to bed, and put a great notice on the wall of the castle, telling all who read what she had done.

After this Crystal's flowers bloomed beautifully. Bloodroot appeared in her delicate white dress and the Bluets danced on the grass. Crystal was growing fast now and was a little girl no longer. She flew farther and farther from the castle, following the tiny stream out from the woods across the meadows where it spread into a wide brook, and down to the bridge under which the Phœbe Bird built her home. Here were the Bush and Shrub Fairies, and Crystal found Grobbo among the white flowers of the Shad Bush, and later the Blue Flag and the Pitcher Plant. Here grew the willows too, and one day they found a huge brown moth laying her eggs on the under side of a willow leaf.

The moth was a friend of Grobbo's, and told

them how, later, the eggs would hatch tiny caterpillars, who would feed on the tender willow leaves, and grow big and fat all summer until at last each caterpillar would spin himself a cocoon, go to sleep in it for the winter, and in the spring come forth a great moth like his mother. Crystal was much interested in this, so nearly every day she flew to the brook to watch the eggs. In about ten days she found a furry little band of black, spiny caterpillars, eating and eating and eating! When she tried to talk with them they would only mumble, with their mouths full—horrid bad manners they had—"Don't bother us—we can't stop to talk—O, how good these leaves are!" and go right on eating and eating and eating! Crystal thought them quite ill bred and decided not to visit them any more; but about two days later, when she flew that way with a Red-winged Blackbird, she was surprised to find all the black caterpillars gone, and some bright orange ones in their places, still eating and eating and eating!

"Where are the black ones?" she exclaimed.

One who had eaten till he could eat no longer, managed to gasp out: "We are the black ones—only we grew so fat we had to stop and

change our dresses. It is an awful nuisance; we can't eat while we are doing it. Later we shall have to change these for green ones trimmed with blue and yellow. Come and see us do it some day. O, I'm so hungry!" And he hurried away to eat again, for his long speech had quite exhausted him.

Crystal was curious to see them change their dresses, so she came every day, and nearly all the caterpillars became friendly, nodding and smiling at her while they were eating, but there was one who always glared fiercely at her, and when she came near he snapped at her with his sharp jaws. He was the greediest one of all and was afraid she would eat some of his leaves.

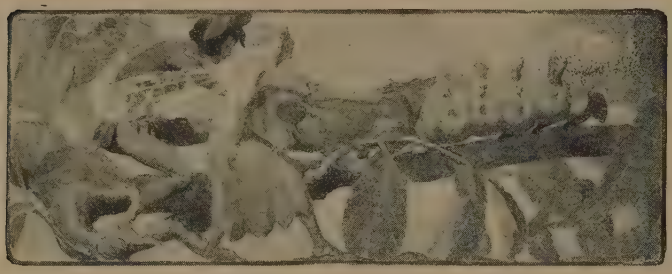
One day she came and found only this one left. He was not eating any more, but sitting perfectly still on a little silk carpet, while all about him, on other little silk carpets, lay the cast-off clothing of all his brothers and sisters. He was crosser than usual, for they had all gone away and left him, but his dress was so tight and hard to get off, because he had eaten so much, that he could not get it off alone. His head, and the front part of his body, in its gay new dress, were free, but his hind legs

were still fast in the old one. Crystal forgot all about his ugly temper when she saw him struggling, and only wanted to help him.

"O," she cried, "wait a minute! Perhaps I can help you."

She ran to him and pulled him off from his little silk carpet.

"Great, clumsy thing!" he shrieked at her. "Now see what you have done! Without my



Then Crystal seized the other side of the skin, and they all pulled together

carpet to fasten my legs in, I can never pull myself free. I shall die—you have killed me!"

Crystal was horrified, for she had not known that Caterpillar's carpet was so important.

"What shall I do?" she sobbed. Just then Grobbo flew by, and she called him, telling him all about it, while Caterpillar lay moaning on his side. Grobbo ran to him, grasped the

old skin, braced himself firmly against a twig, and pulled with all his might. Caterpillar struggled, but could not free himself. Then Crystal seized the other side of the skin, and they all pulled together. Caterpillar sprawled forward on his face, free—but, alas! one of his five pairs of hind legs was left in the old skin, and he limped painfully as he got to his feet. He reared up on his other four pairs of legs and shook his head savagely at Crystal.

"You have made me lame," he roared, "and some day you shall pay for it! All my days I shall never walk like other caterpillars. But by and by I shall be large and strong, much bigger than you, and then—beware! I shall never forget that you are the cause of my misfortune. When the wind rustles in the leaves it shall say to you, 'Beware of the Lame Caterpillar!' When the brook sings to you as you fly above it, it shall say, 'Beware of the Lame Caterpillar!' And he hobbled away.

Grobbo would have pierced him with his sword, but Crystal clung to him, sobbing and afraid.

"I didn't mean to hurt him," she mourned. "I was only trying to help him. O, what shall I do?"

"Don't be frightened, Princess," replied Grobbo, soothingly. "I will not let him hurt you. When I am away from you soldiers shall be detailed to guard you, and Godmother—why, don't you remember Godmother's wish for you —'to inspire love in the heart of every creature'? He will soon get over his anger and realize that it was only an accident."

"He hasn't any heart—he has only a stomach," sobbed Crystal.

Grobbo comforted her; and he was so big and strong and handsome, and promised so faithfully to protect her, that her fears faded away, and she flew home with him, quite hopeful.

The apple trees were in bloom in the Man's orchard at the edge of the wood, and as they flew through the pink blossoms Grobbo's bees were humming and buzzing at their work. They all saluted Crystal, and one of them reported to Grobbo that a new company was to be formed. So, next day, Grobbo and the Guards set out to escort the company to its new home, assign the work, and decide which room in the Royal Storehouse it should fill. Crystal asked permission to go too, and was soon seated in the top of a fir balsam tree,

watching with great interest. It was all confusion at first, the bees flying about excitedly until the Queen finally settled on a low branch. Then they all crowded about her, hanging on the branch and on each other, until there was a huge round mass of singing, humming bees.

Grobbo flew to Crystal. "We must wait awhile now," he said; "then—"

But just here two figures came cautiously through the wood, and Crystal and Grobbo looked in wonder and amazement. One was tall and one was short, but both were queer. Their overalls were tied down over their boots, thick gloves stretched up their arms, and their faces were invisible because of the white netting that covered their hats, heads, and necks. The large figure carried a great square box in its hand. From the small figure came a shrill, excited little voice: "There they are, Daddy! Over there on that tree. My! aren't there a lot of 'em? Do you think you can hive 'em all, Daddy?"

"It is Little Son John and the Daddy-man," exclaimed Crystal. "What are they going to do?"

"I don't know," replied Grobbo. "They are looking at our bees."

Daddy walked up to the mass of bees and set the strange box on a rock beneath them. Slowly and cautiously he lowered the branch on which they hung, and shook them gently into the box. He shut a door on them.

"He has captured the new Bee Company," said Grobbo, in dismay. "What a wicked man!"

Daddy carried the box out to the wood road, put it on a wheelbarrow, and went away, while Crystal, Grobbo, and the soldiers flew swiftly to the castle to report the loss. The King was sleeping—he was working nights, you remember—but the Queen was very much disturbed.

"What is there to prevent his taking our whole army?" she inquired, anxiously. "Then what should we do for our winter supply of food?"

"Let Grobbo and me go and ask Little Son John what it means," suggested Crystal. "He was good to us when we were at his house, and the Daddy-man was good too."

The Queen consented, and soon Son John's mother, looking up from her work, thought she saw two butterflies on the outside of the window. Daddy's eyes were sharper.

"They are the fairies that John brought

home in the spring," he said. Little Son John shouted with delight, and ran out of doors. Grobbo and Crystal were soon flying about his head, asking questions.

"Why did your Daddy take our soldiers?" asked Grobbo.

"Well, sir, my Daddy hasn't any soldiers! I have though, but Santa Claus brought them to me. They're not yours."

"Yes," Crystal insisted, "he did take our soldiers and put them in a box. There it is now, across the road."

"O," scoffed John, "those ain't soldiers. That's a swarm of bees he found in the wood. He watched 'em, and he thought they'd swarm pretty soon, and they did.

"A swarm of bees in May
Is worth a load of hay."

"They're our bees," Crystal said; "they store away our winter food supply in the Royal Storehouse."

Daddy came out now. He had been listening in the doorway.

"I came mighty near cutting down that big bee-tree," he said. "I'm glad I didn't if it is your storehouse. My little boy likes honey

too, and I promised him I'd get him a hive of bees. If you will lend them to me for this summer, I'll give you back a nice swarm next year, and I won't let anyone cut the old bee-tree down as long as you want it."

When Crystal and Grobbo heard what a narrow escape they had had from losing the Royal Storehouse they were much relieved, and gladly agreed to let Little Son John have the new Bee Company for the summer. Grobbo flew to the hive and explained the matter to the astonished bees, and then he and Crystal flew back to the castle to report to the waiting Court.

There was great rejoicing at the assured safety of the food supply, but when the King woke and heard of it he was angry, as usual. That night he tried to get Poison Ivy to poison Little Son John and his Daddy, but Busybody Bat told Godmother, and she sent the King a nettle rash that kept him very uncomfortable for a whole week.

CHAPTER VI

S spring blossomed into summer the woods became filled with flowers and fairies. Most of the plants were blooming splendidly by this time, which was fortunate, because Midsummer Day with its revels was near at hand, and many of the fairies must help in the preparations. News of the festival spread swiftly through the wood. Mother Nighthawk, sitting on her speckled eggs on the bare ledge in the field, heard Chipmunk and Red Squirrel talking about it and boomed it across the sky as she swooped at evening for her supper. Lame Caterpillar, limping through the grass far below, heard her and listened to every word.

"Where do the fairies hold their revels?" he asked little Red Salamander, who lived by the spring.

"Way over on the sandy beach."

"And where is that?"

"Ever so far from here. Folks who swim can

go across the lake, but you would have to walk around. It would take you longer too, because you are lame."

"Will the Princess be there?" eagerly inquired Lame Caterpillar.

"Of course. The revels are going to be particularly fine this year on her account."

Lame Caterpillar forgot to say "Thank you," he was so anxious to get to the sandy beach. He hurried away, asking everyone he met if he were on the right road. For several days he traveled, hardly stopping to rest, and at last he reached the beach. Some of his cousins whom he met on the way told him he was in plenty of time, so he settled down to rest and wait patiently.

After the King had recovered from his nettle rash he had been very good, attending to his work so well that all the poisonous plants and shrubs were bright and green, waving their danger signals to all who came that way. Godmother was so pleased with his conduct that she had allowed him to stop work a week before the revels, and he was now engaged in dictating the invitations to Solomon's Seal, who wrote them out very neatly and carefully.

The fairy kingdom extended for many miles,

much too far for the King himself to govern the whole of it, so he appointed certain noblemen to rule as lieutenants over the streams, the meadows, and the great mountain. Each year they and their people were invited to join in the Midsummer Revels, which were held on the shining white beach at the farther side of the lake. This year in particular the nobles were awaiting their invitations with especial eagerness, for the fame of the Princess Crystal had spread far and wide. Schoolmaster Owl, Truant Officer Kingfisher, Court Carpenter Chickadee, and all the other birds were also invited. The King crossed Busybody Bat's name off the list, but Godmother found it out and made him put it back again, so he had to dictate Bat's invitation to Solomon's Seal after all! Solomon expected the King to be very cross about it, and was exceedingly surprised to find that he smiled as he spoke Bat's name.

When they were all done the King called the messengers and sent them forth. To the Fairies of the Fields and Meadows, whose lord is Red Clover, went Gill-over-the-ground, mounted on a green grasshopper who took long leaps through the woods and was soon out of sight. Wild Rose, on a gorgeous dragon fly, soared away

with the invitation for Cardinal Flower, who rules the Fairies of the Streams. Bunchberry's steed was a butterfly—Painted Beauty—who carried him swiftly to the high mountain where Sir Mountain Laurel holds his windy Court. Columbine carried the invitations to Owl, Kingfisher, and Chickadee, and Grobbo to the other birds. He expected to carry Busybody Bat's too, but, much to his surprise, the King said, "I'll attend to this invitation myself."

Now, Busybody Bat sleeps all day, so his invitation had to be delivered at night; therefore, when the Court was all safely asleep, the King left the castle. He crept softly through the woods, walking on the shadows of the trees, and trying not to make a sound, but once he stumbled into a thrush's nest and the mother bird gave a startled cry. Master Owl, out doing his marketing, heard the unusual sound and called, "Whoo? Whoo? Whoo?" Busybody Bat himself, flitting happily about in search of news, answered quickly, "I don't know, but I'll go see!" and flew after the King. He was astonished to see the King in the woods that night because he knew that Godmother had excused him from his work, and he was still more astonished to see him suddenly fall

on his knees, dig furiously in the earth and bury something in a deep hole. Busybody Bat could not dig in the earth himself, so when the King went away he carefully marked the place and hurried at once to the house of his cousin, Mistress Mole, who was a famous miner and digger. The next day Mistress Mole went to the spot and dug and dug until she found a nice wasp-paper envelope, all crumpled and dirty. She was blind, so, of course, she could not read it; but she took it home, and when Busybody Bat came that evening he read it just as soon as it was dark enough for him to see. *And it was his invitation to the revels!*

"O—ho," said Busybody Bat, and "Ah—ha," said Busybody Bat. "We shall see!"

Crystal was so excited she could hardly wait for the return of the messengers. The fairies all accepted; but Kingfisher, Chickadee, and most of the birds sent word that they should be obliged to leave before the revels were over, as they were not used to being out at night, and, besides, they had to get up very early every morning to sing in the Chorus of the Dawn. Whippoorwill wrote, as usual, that he would be delighted to come, and Master Owl accepted for himself and family in a formal

note. The squirrels and chipmunks hastened to the castle, chattering their acceptances from the treetops, but nothing at all was heard from Busybody Bat.

Grobbo did not seem very happy during this busy time—perhaps he did not care for all the strangers to see his Princess. Still, he went faithfully about his work, for his was the task of providing the conveyances for the Court, while Columbine had charge of the escort.

At last the great day came, and at sunset the Court prepared to cross the lake. Crystal had a beautiful dress of glorious shimmering white silk with a long train, and the King was so proud of her that he kept walking around and around her, smoothing her dress here, straightening her train there, and arranging her long golden hair, which hung below her knees.

The Queen, attended by Anemone, Wild Calla, and Black-eyed Susan, her favorite ladies-in-waiting, sat calmly on the throne waiting till the Twin-flower bells should give the signal to start.

"Why don't we go? Why don't we go?" impatiently demanded the King. "Where is that Grobbo? Where is my chariot? We shall

be late! The guests will arrive before we do. We shall certainly be late."

"Godmother hasn't come yet, father dear," replied Crystal. "We couldn't go without her."

"Of course she hasn't come! She is always late. She was late the day you were born, and if I hadn't sent for her she wouldn't have been here yet. I told her what I thought of her. If she can't get here on time, we will start without her."

Just then the Twin-flower chimes rang through the wood. Crystal ran to the castle door, followed by the Court. Grobbo and Columbine stood at attention on either side of the entrance, the long row of oak-leaf chariots was ready, and their butterfly steeds were trembling with desire to be away. The Royal Guards were drawn up on parade, while the Bee Brigade and the Wasp Reserves waited at one side to act as advance and rear guard.

"Which is Godmother's chariot, Grobbo?" asked Crystal. "Isn't she here?"

"Here? No—late as usual," interrupted the King. "We will wait no longer. Columbine, give the order to march."

He stepped into the royal chariot, where the Queen and Crystal were already seated.

Columbine did not answer. He leaned against the castle wall, and his head drooped lower and lower. Grobbo swayed back and forth, his eyes shut tight. The wings of all the butterflies closed slowly. The bees and wasps clung drowsily to the trees. The King stood up and looked about him. He saw the Queen and Crystal leaning against the high back of the chariot. He saw the ladies-in-waiting, silent and motionless, the unconscious soldiers and the whole silent Court.

"Here's a pretty state of affairs," he scolded. "They have all gone to sleep."

"Yes, they rest while they wait for me," said a sweet voice above his head, as Godmother, driving her little blue Spring Butterflies, came floating down a golden beam of the setting sun. "They are not so impatient as you, Sir King. But now we will start. Grobbo, let us go."

The bees and wasps waked, buzzing loudly, the sleeping Court stirred and the butterflies opened their wings. At Columbine's word of command the procession started. Through the length of the wood, through the Man's orchard, across the meadows and down to the banks of the lake they flew, chattering gaily. First

At Columbine's word of command the procession started

came a company of bees, then Columbine, leading the Royal Guards, the heralds blowing honeysuckle horns; the royal chariot drawn by ten huge Yellow Swallow-tails, escorted by Grobbo and followed by Godmother; then the ladies-in-waiting, drawn by the Banded Purples, and all the Court, each coach drawn by four yellow or white butterflies, while at either side and bringing up the rear came the fierce Wasp Reserves. The Fairy Wood was deserted by its guardians, and Little Son John, walking along the old wood road with his father and mother, began to whimper, saying: "Well, sir, let's get home. I don't like it here to-night. It's lonesome, and I think there's bears about!"

At the shore of the lake the butterflies settled gently on the grass and the fairies descended from their chariots. Floating at the water's edge, rocking gently on the ripples, was a great fleet of lily-pad boats, each with a silken spider-web sail. Every boat was steered by a water-boatman, and just beneath each pad waited a turtle, his sharp jaws close beside the stem that held it anchored. The fairies quickly embarked and Columbine gave the signal. All the turtles bit savagely at the strong lily stems, the boats were released, and the whole company sailed

across the lake in the dazzling shaft of light shot by the setting sun. Escorting them went the fish who lived in the lake, the silvery Perch, the black pirate Horned Pout, with their fierce whiskers and sharp daggers, and all the long-nosed Pickerel, whose home is deep among the lily-pads. Big Black Bass, whom all the fishermen talk about but never catch, went ahead with news of their coming. When they reached the sandy beach the little Spotted Sandpipers with their white vests all freshly washed and ironed, stood in a long row at the very edge of the water, bowing and curtseying and screaming in shrill little voices, "Hail, O King—hail, O Queen—hail, O Princess Crystal —Welcome on this Midsummer Eve—Welcome —Welcome!"

The Bull-Frog Brass Band, concealed among the rushes, boomed forth a salute, the Veeries rang their chimes, then, faint and far-away in the deep pine forest, sounded the evening solo of the Hermit Thrush.

"O, isn't it beautiful!" breathed Crystal as Grobbo helped her onto the sand.

A musical call was heard from the direction of the creek. Turning, they saw the Wood Duck swimming swiftly toward them, her babies

in front of her, and all laden with a laughing, scrambling horde of fairies from the creeks and brooks. Sir Cardinal Flower leaped from Wood Duck's neck and saluted the King.

"Your Majesty, the Fairies of the Streams pay homage to the Princess Crystal. Our good friend, Wood Duck, tumbled her brood out of the nest in the hollow tree into the water only this morning that we might ride with them to your revels."

The Stream Fairies knelt before the Princess, who welcomed them.

The sun had set behind the hill, but the sky was full of rosy clouds, against which soon appeared a dark mass.

"An army is coming," cried the King, in alarm. "Assemble the Guards."

All watched anxiously, but soon Crystal exclaimed, "They are fairies!"

Led by Sir Mountain Laurel, the Fairies of the Mountain were flying to the revels on their own strong wings. Their dresses of gray and green had looked dark against the brilliant sunset, but soon they alighted on the beach and were gladly welcomed.

Now across the lake came a noisy twittering, and a flock of swallows flew low over the water,

swooping and soaring, bearing on their backs the Field and Meadow Fairies, led by Lord Red Clover.

The birds came from all directions, and Master Owl, with his wife and family, flapped through the woods and perched on the dead trees hung with hammocks of gray moss. Later, when the babies were tired, Mother Owl put them to bed in the hammocks.

"Where is Busybody Bat?" inquired Godmother; but the King pretended not to hear.

The whole company now seated themselves. Godmother took Crystal by the hand and led her out onto the shining white beach. The great moon was peeping over the hills and touching the lake with silver.

"Midsummer Night is come," said Godmother. "Now let our revels begin. The Princess shall lead us in the dance."

The cricket orchestra, who had been scraping and tuning their fiddles, now began a merry lay, the mosquitoes sang loud and sweetly, and all the fairies leaped to their feet. Up and down the sands they danced, in and out, always following Crystal, who floated about, now dancing in the moonlight at the water's edge, now leading them toward the dark pines that

bordered the beach. Among the red pines dusky forms flitted from tree to tree, and bright eyes watched the lovely Princess.

The first dance over, the Mountain Fairies danced alone, leaping high in the air and floating gracefully on their strong wings. The Field Fairies twined the Maypole. The Stream Fairies danced, advancing and retreating like the ripples of the water. Then Crystal danced alone, and all the little minnows swam inshore to watch her and stuck their heads out into the air to see until they gasped for breath. The dark forms in the pine woods drew nearer during her dance, till silently, slowly, from out the shadows came a stealthy figure that stood motionless in the moonlight, watching the Princess. Grobbo was the first to see it, and, drawing his sword, crept toward it. Black-eyed Susan saw the moonlight flash on Grobbo's sword and screamed. The fairies turned in alarm and saw a troop of ghostly Indian Pipes drawn up at the edge of the woods. The King strode angrily toward the dark painted figure standing still in the moonlight.

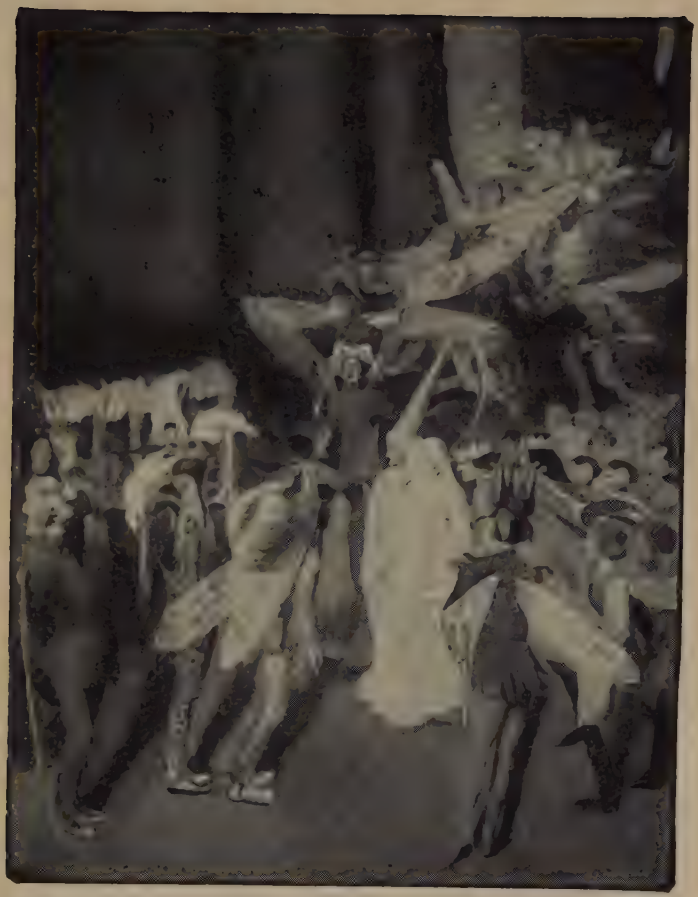
"Who are you," he demanded, "and what do you mean by coming unbidden to our revels? Explain, sir."

"I am Painted Trillium, the Chief of the Indian Fairies," the stranger replied, courteously. "Many years ago we were the only fairies in this place. There were no white men here then. In yonder field the Indians lie buried, and across the road is the sunken fireplace of stone where they used to cook their food. While my people have been working in the woods, they have sometimes caught a glimpse of a beautiful pale maiden, bending lovingly above her flowers. Moccasin Flower has seen her often. Pipsissewa heard to-day from Red Squirrel that the King would hold revels here to-night, and we thought perhaps the Snow Maiden might be here. I think that this is she. Moccasin Flower, is this the maiden?"

Dusky Moccasin Flower stepped forward and looked closely at Crystal. "It is she."

"This is what comes of your chasing all over the country—working—working!" raged the King at Crystal. "Who ever heard of Indian Fairies? You didn't have any invitation to come to our revels. Solomon's Seal, did you send this person an invitation?"

Arrowhead, a large warrior who stood behind Trillium, advanced toward the King, but



Dusky Moccasin Flower stepped forward and looked closely at Crystal

Godmother stepped forward and laid her hand on his weapon.

"King," she said, "your rude tongue will cause you serious trouble some day. Your unbidden guest comes truly of the race that owned these woods and streams while you were yet unborn. The Indian Fairies are few indeed now, and seldom do they show themselves. In all my long life I can remember only a few times that they have been seen by any but their own race. That they come here to-night to do honor to your daughter should cause you great pride.

"O Painted Trillium, the Princess Crystal appreciates this honor. She invites you and your company to join our revels; and if you can show her any of the secrets of your woods, she will be very glad. The King is hasty, and there are many things he has yet to learn. Forgive him, and think of his rude words no longer."

The Indians came forward and greeted Crystal. Then Trillium gave a low call, and from the darkness came troops of fireflies, each carrying his lantern and waving it to and fro about the Indians, who performed their war dance. Trillium stood at Crystal's side while

Moccasin Flower danced before her. All the noblemen were very attentive, and crowded about Crystal; but at last Trillium said, boldly: "Will you come with me to the side of the road, Princess? I would show you something."

Crystal looked for Grobbo, but he was hunting for one of Godmother's blue butterflies which had strayed away, and was nowhere to be seen. So she went with Trillium across the road. In a dark rut something reared its head and watched them as they passed. Trillium took her to the hidden side door of the Ovenbird's nest, and showed her the mother bird sitting on her eggs. Something moved unseen in the grass beside the nest.

"The Ovenbird is the wisest bird in the Indian wood," said Trillium, "and all come to him for advice and teaching. So, because his house is hard to find, and because he often walks by himself, thinking and studying, he frequently calls, to let people know where he is, loud and ever louder—"Teacher—*teacher* —TEACHER—TEACHER!"

Something moved behind Crystal, and a voice spoke in her ear: "Wise he may be, but he cannot teach you to escape from the *Lame Caterpillar*," and she turned quickly to see her

old enemy, grown fat and large, towering above her. She screamed. Trillium wheeled, his arrow drawn to his shoulder, but Caterpillar was already limping silently away through the underbrush.

"What is it?" exclaimed Trillium. "What frightened you?"

Crystal explained.

"I will find him and kill him," declared Trillium. "No one knows the woods as I and my people. My scouts shall seek for him, and he cannot escape."

As Trillium led Crystal back to the beach a loud buzzing sounded through the air, and Busybody Bat appeared, leading a great company of June Bugs and carrying his crumpled, dirty invitation.

"Please excuse me for not coming before," he gasped, "but it took me so long to get ready, and my invitation was late in arriving. I think it must have been mislaid."

He handed it to the King, who turned very red in the face.

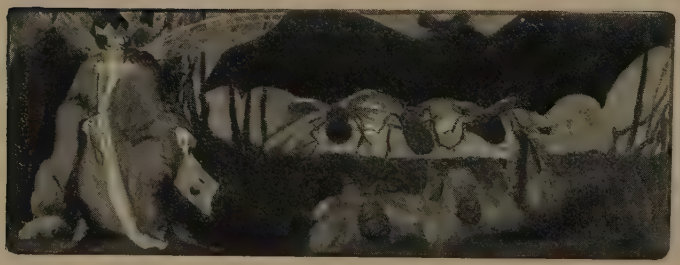
"We should like to dance," said Bat. "We have a special feature, made up for the revels."

The June Bugs began a blundering, clumsy dance, buzzing loudly and flying nearer and

nearer to the King. Louder and louder they buzzed, and closer and closer they flew. Then they began to sing:

"Late at night he wandered—
Deep he dug the hole!
Thought he hid it safely—
Forgot old Mistress Mole!"

"Late at night she wandered—
Deep she dug the hole!
Busy's invitation
Found by Mistress Mole!"



The June Bugs began a blundering, clumsy dance, buzzing loudly and flying nearer and nearer to the King

Busybody Bat snatched his crumpled invitation from the King, and waved it so everyone could see it. Of course they all knew what the King had done, and he was very much ashamed, and wanted to go away and hide. But as he felt so badly, and as it was Midsummer Night,

Busybody Bat forgave him and asked Godmother not to punish him.

So then the company was summoned to the banquet, which was spread on mushrooms and served by the Wild Strawberry Fairies in white caps. They bore large strawberry leaf platters, loaded with the sweet red berries, and garnished with dewdrops that sparkled and glittered in the light of the full moon. The fairies sat on fairy-ring mushrooms which grew in circles and so near that each could talk with his neighbor, and everyone was cozy and sociable. Godmother sat with Crystal and Grobbo and the noblemen. Grobbo was very happy to be there, because he had not liked to have Crystal talking to the fairy lords so much, and when the Partridge Berry Twins had whispered to him that she had gone across the road with Trillium he had been very miserable indeed!

By the time the feasting was ended the great round moon was small and pale in the sky, and the stars were fading. A cock crew on the other side of the lake. The revels were over!

The Fairies of the Mountain started on their long home flight. The Indians vanished in the shadowy woods. The Stream Fairies

roused Wood Duck and her brood, who had been snugly sleeping by the rocky point. The Field and Meadow fairies rode home with the Court on the Night Moths, which were big and strong. Lieutenant Primrose and his picked band of Luna Moths escorted the Princess, and the beach was deserted.

When the sun rose, and the Indian Fairies were far away, out from his hiding place limped Lame Caterpillar. Along the road he went, wagging his head, and talking to himself. On a sheep-laurel he saw a great cocoon. Then he remembered something he had known a long time before.

"That's the kind of a house my family builds," he said, thoughtfully. "They are nice, roomy houses. I must build me a house. I think I'll build my house near the Fairy Wood."

He looked at the empty house a long time, then he turned and hobbled away in the direction of the distant castle.

CHAPTER VII

THE day after the revels Godmother had a long talk with the King and Queen. Later she called Crystal to her.

"Crystal," she said, "you are a little girl no longer. You cannot romp and play as you have done all the spring, but must now be learning the ways of your kingdom and thinking of the good of your subjects. For you are the King's daughter, and some day you will rule in your father's place. Also, as you are a royal Princess, you must have two ladies in waiting, and these you may choose from among your playmates."

"O, I don't want to grow up," cried Crystal, in dismay, "I want to work and play among my flowers, and fly about with Grobbo. O, I shall never be happy if I have to grow up."

"Everyone must grow," answered Godmother. "There is no help for that; but if we are careful not to let our hearts grow old, it makes no difference about our bodies. And your heart

will always be young. A loving heart can never grow old. The King has this morning appointed Grobbo one of his councilors, and he will advise you when you are in doubt, and always be at your call when you may wish to visit any part of the kingdom. But you must no longer go without an escort. Now, choose your ladies-in-waiting."

"If I must have ladies in waiting, I'll have the jolliest ones I know," replied Crystal. "I choose the Partridge Berry Twins."

Godmother smiled, but only said, "Very well, we will go and tell your father and mother."

The King was quite disgusted at Crystal's choice, shouting: "They are fat! They are short and fat! Who ever heard of short, fat ladies in waiting? They should be tall and slender."

Crystal, who was already finding the powers of a Princess rather agreeable, insisted, and the King finally called Anemone and ordered two brand new red silk dresses for the twins. They were delighted when they heard that Crystal had chosen them for her attendants, and ran to find her and hugged her very hard, one on each side.

"Isn't it splendid about Grobbo too?" they

cried. "Old Green Snake, who lives behind our rock, says he is the youngest councilor ever appointed. It is a great honor."

Crystal made many trips about the kingdom, escorted by Grobbo and attended by the Partridge Berry Twins. They flew to the grassy meadows, where Crystal rested in Mistress Bobolink's sheltered home, then, perched by her side on a swaying grass stalk, watched Grobbo and the guards train the new fairy steeds—the Black Swallow-tail Butterflies, the speckled Fritillaries, the Royal Monarchs and the smaller Viceroys. They were all very happy together until their visit of inspection to the Royal Storehouse. The bees were coming in from the clover field, laden with pollen and flying busily into the tree. Suddenly the Partridge Berry Twins, who were watching them, gave a little squeal.

"O, what is that funny green thing that bee is carrying?"

This bee, instead of flying into the larder, came toward Crystal and dropped his burden at her feet.

Grobbo exclaimed in astonishment, "That is not one of our bees!"

Another and another followed, each dropping

his load, until she was standing in a heap of tiny, carefully cut bits of green leaves that completely covered her feet.

"Why, what are these?" she asked. "And where did they come from?"

"They are letters from Lord Red Clover, who loves you and would marry you," explained a bee. "We are his leaf-cutter bees, and we have cut these from the fresh green leaves. On each one he has written you a letter, asking you for your hand."

Crystal turned to Grobbo. "What shall I do?" she asked, deeply distressed. "I don't want any love letters. I wish he wouldn't send them to me. I don't like him. Let us go home."

She stepped out from the pile of letters, shrinking from them as she did so, and Grobbo's heart grew light at her words and actions, for he loved her dearly and did not want her to love anyone else. He vowed never to let Red Clover or any other lord annoy her, and they flew home hand-in-hand, never even noticing that the Partridge Berry Twins were not with them.

The Partridge Berry Twins were seated on the floor of the storehouse, in the midst of the

love letters, reading them all just as fast as ever they could, before they should wither.

As summer grew and all the yellow flowers gilded the land, Mountain Ash and Pyrola flew from the high mountain as ambassadors from Sir Mountain Laurel, who wished to marry Crystal. Sir Cardinal Flower visited the castle, escorted by Pickerel Weed and a company of tall Cat Tails, to woo her in person, but she sent them both away. The King grew angrier and angrier, Grobbo became happier and happier, but the tender-hearted little Partridge Berry Twins shed many tears over the sorrows of the departing guests. Crystal's ladies in waiting were no longer jolly; she herself was distressed by her suitors, and the King was too angry even to scold. He sat sulking on the throne, wondering why Crystal would not marry one of the fairy noblemen. He could not imagine the reason till one day Skunk Cabbage requested an audience of him. Skunk Cabbage had grown so big and fat that he could not get in at the castle door, but the King very obligingly came out into the courtyard to hear what he had to say.

"I know, your Majesty," wheezed Skunk Cabbage, "I know the reason why the Princess

will not marry any of her suitors. She loves Grobbo, that lazy good-for-nothing who wastes all his time flying about with her. He will marry her and reign in your place. Even now he is making himself popular with your subjects."

The King, who was already jealous of Grobbo because everyone loved him, was only too glad to believe Skunk Cabbage.

"It is true," he said at once; "your words are wise, good Skunk Cabbage. I am glad to be warned in time. I will banish Grobbo, and you shall be councilor in his place."

Skunk Cabbage could hardly believe his ears. This was more than he had hoped for, and he really thought it was all a dream until he received a summons to attend a meeting of the Royal Council at the castle. A new door, extra large, had been cut to admit him, and a huge mushroom seat was placed for him at the council table. The King and his councilors sat about the table, while before them stood Grobbo, stern and dignified.

"Skunk Cabbage," commanded the King, "repeat, please, the facts you told me about the Councilor Grobbo and the Princess Crystal."

Now Skunk Cabbage had really told much

more than he knew, and had not thought he would be obliged to speak before the Council, especially with Grobbo looking at him so scornfully, so he was confused and stammered and hesitated.

"Do not be afraid to speak," urged the King. "I will protect you."

Skunk Cabbage mumbled his story, and the councilors looked at the King to see what he would do. When they saw him so angry they looked at each other, nodding their heads gravely and saying, "Something must be done."

Only hoary-headed Mullein stood up, saying: "It is right and proper that the Princess Crystal and the Councilor Grobbo should love each other. All their lives they have been playmates and friends. Godmother meant them for each other when she brought the baby Grobbo from his home in the hollow stump."

If Mullein had not been the oldest councilor in the kingdom the King would have banished him too, but he did not quite dare to do that, so he only raged at him, and then proceeded to pronounce the sentence of banishment upon Grobbo. Mullein slipped unheeded from the room.

"You shall go from the Fairy Kingdom, never

to return," the King said to Grobbo. "My people shall have no dealings with you in any way. Far across the lake, in the depths of the pine woods, shall you dwell, apart and alone. Bind him to the hawk who sails in the sky higher than our eyes can see, and let him be carried far from us!"

Two guards stepped forward, but Grobbo waved them back.

"I go, bound to no high-sailing hawk, Sir King," he replied, clearly. "Nor shall anyone here bind me in any way. You can banish me, but you cannot change the heart of your daughter, the Princess Crystal. She loves me, and the stubborn will of her father dwells also in her. She will remain faithful to me. And I, in the pine woods—"

Crystal burst into the council chamber, followed by Mullein. Straight to Grobbo she flew and put her arms around him. The Partridge Berry Twins, with wide, frightened eyes, peeked in at the open door. Still holding Grobbo, Crystal turned to her father.

"What does this mean, father?" she demanded. "What is this talk of banishment that I hear? What has Grobbo done except to be faithful and true and to help everyone in

every way? If he goes from the kingdom, then your daughter goes too. For I love him, and him only will I marry."

"Stand aside," roared the King, advancing with his hands raised as if to strike her. "Go back to your apartments. It is not fitting for a woman to be in the council chamber." He turned to Mullein. "This is your work," he cried. "You told her that Grobbo was to be banished."

"I did, indeed," replied Mullein. "She is the heir to the throne of Fairyland, and has a right to know the doings of the council."

Grobbo had been whispering to Crystal, and she now released him, looking scornfully at her father.

"We will obey you," she said. "You are the King, even if you are unjust. Grobbo will go to the dark pine woods, but you will never make me marry another. You will be sorry for what you have done this day."

She left the hall, and at once sent the Partridge Berry Twins to summon all the Flower Fairies to her presence.

That night the King, the Council, and the Royal Guards escorted Grobbo to the shore of the lake and watched his lonely flight to

the tall red pines, far on the other side. Little did they know that Crystal had already sent a fleet dragon-fly with tidings of his coming, or that Painted Trillium, with all his tribe, was waiting to receive him with every honor. Neither did they know of the presence of the Flower Fairies in the dim audience chamber of the castle, where Crystal was addressing them.

"Friends and playmates," she said, "the King, my father, has unjustly banished Grobbo from the fairy kingdom. His only fault is that he loves me. My father thinks to force me to marry a lord, but that I will never do. You all love Grobbo—you are all his friends. Will you help me, then, to bring him back again?"

"We will—we will," shouted all the fairies together.

"How can we do it?" asked Purple Aster.

"We can do what the King himself tried to persuade us to do in the spring," answered Goldenrod. "We can refuse to work. Our flowers will wither, our buds will blight and our leaves will curl up and die. There will soon be no Fairy Wood at all if we all do that. And we will do it if the King does not recall Grobbo!"

"Yes! Yes!" cried the fairies with one voice. "We will do that."

"O, how can I thank you?" said Crystal. "But I hear the guards returning. Go now and tell no one."

The fairies slipped quietly away, and no one knew of the meeting, not even Busybody Bat, because he had followed Grobbo across the lake.

Next day Columbine escorted Goldenrod, Aster, and Fringed Gentian to the council chamber, where they politely asked the King to reconsider his action and recall Grobbo. As they had expected, he absolutely refused, and they reported their failure to their companions.

True to their word, the Flower Fairies stopped work at once; the Tree Fairies learned of the plan and were only too glad to help, and joined them in their idleness. Soon the flowers in the Fairy Wood were drooping, the leaves were falling from the trees, and the ferns were dry and curled. It was not long before the King noticed this condition and demanded the reason from Columbine.

"Your subjects refuse to work until you recall the Councilor Grobbo," he replied.

"I will never do it," shouted the King. "Call out the Bee Brigade and the Wasp Reserves, and force my subjects to work!"

The bees and wasps needed the flowers and their honey badly, but they loved Grobbo too, and refused to march against the rebellious subjects.

Soon the wood was so dry that Little Son John's father did not dare to make a brush fire for fear he should set it ablaze, and every morning he searched the sky for rain clouds, that the flowers and trees might live again. He did not know that rain would not help—that only Grobbo's return could make the wood blossom as it had before.

Busybody Bat learned that Grobbo was living in great honor with the Indian Fairies, and very often he flew across the lake to tell him of Crystal and how hard his companions were trying to bring about his return. One night he flew to Crystal's window and wakened her from her sleep.

"It is Busybody Bat," he whispered. "Come out. I have a present for you from Grobbo." He had four fireflies clinging to one of his wings. "If we fly to the mouth of the creek," he explained, "Grobbo can see the lanterns of the fireflies from the Indian woods. He will be on the beach with his own fireflies, and will signal you from there. You can return his signals with these that he has sent you."

Crystal flew swiftly with Bat to the creek, and there, across the water, at the edge of the black woods, were four tiny flashes of light. Grobbo's fireflies waved their lanterns and Crystal's answered. Every night after that, Bat would call her, and they would fly to the creek to communicate with Grobbo. Soon she began to go there in the daytime, even though she could see nothing of him. She liked to sit with Red-winged Blackbird in her house and watch the Indian woods. The Partridge Berry Twins—sad little twins they were now—often went with her, but it was a long, hard fly for their round little wings, and sometimes she went alone. She always went the same way—through the woods to the orchard, then to the bridge over the brook and across the swampy meadow by the willows that fringed the widening creek. Always her eyes were looking eagerly ahead, so she did not see Lame Caterpillar hiding in the thick willows.

Lame Caterpillar watched her sharply every time with his treacherous eyes, and while she was resting with Mother Red-wing he climbed up and down the willow branches, hunting for a proper place to build his house. At last he found a branch that suited him and he was

much relieved, for he knew by his queer feelings that he could not wait much longer. That day he watched intently for Crystal's appearance. At last he saw her coming, alone as he had hoped. When she was directly over the willow he called to her.

"Princess, come into the willow," he said. "There is one here with news of Grobbo."

"Who calls me?" said Crystal, fluttering close to the branch under which Lame Caterpillar was hiding, and looking all about to see who spoke.

"Here," whispered Caterpillar, softly.

Crystal alighted on the branch.

Lame Caterpillar reared, seizing her in his thick, strong arms.

Mother Red-wing waited in vain for her visitor, and that night Grobbo's signals were unanswered. When Busybody Bat got no response to his knocking on Crystal's window he thought perhaps the King had learned of her nightly wanderings and confined her in some other room in the castle. He slept all day, so knew nothing of the dismay in the wood when the Princess could not be found. The King was very angry, as well as frightened, and

rushed about, ordering everyone to search here and search there and blaming this one and that one for her disappearance. The fairies flew about among the dying flowers and trees, but soon it was plain to everyone that the Princess Crystal, the heir to the throne of Fairyland, had mysteriously disappeared. Messengers were sent to the lords, asking aid, and they came with all their soldiers to help in the search. The wasps and the bees buzzed loudly over the fields, and the Partridge Berry Twins flew at once to the mouth of the creek; but Mother Red-wing could only tell them that Crystal had not been there. When they flew home they were crying so hard they could not even see the willow trees, and so knew nothing of the new house building among their branches.

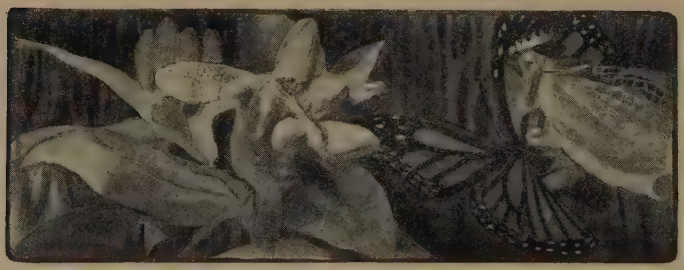
As more and more messengers returned to the castle with the same story, the Queen wept harder and harder and the King raged more and more. At last he called for his favorite Monarch and announced his intention of finding her himself. High in the air he sailed, asking of all the winged creatures if they had seen the Princess Crystal. Close over the earth he skimmed, inquiring of the ants and beetles.

At the moist edge of the wood road he found sleepy Closed Gentian.

"Have you seen my daughter? Has the Princess Crystal passed this way?" he shouted in her ear.

But Closed Gentian only shook her head and murmured, drowsily: "I have not seen anyone. I had my eyes shut."

The Queen sent for Busybody Bat and implored him to find Godmother and tell her of



Closed Gentian only shook her head and murmured, drowsily: "I have not seen anyone. I had my eyes shut"

Crystal's disappearance. Bat was quite alarmed, as he knew nothing of the Princess's daylight visits to the creek, and the Partridge Berry Twins were too frightened to tell anything they knew. With their arms around each other, they sat in the corner and cried. They thought perhaps she had flown across the lake to join

Grobbo, and shivered and shook as they imagined the King's wrath when he should find it out. At last the King began to suspect that she might have done this, but Ovenbird, who came from the Indian wood to teach his evening classes, reported that she had not been there. Then indeed were the Partridge Berry Twins quite hopeless, and feared more than ever to tell of her trips to the creek. The King refused to allow Bat to go for Godmother

"That woman has meddled enough in my affairs," he declared. "If she had not brought Grobbo to the castle, all this would not have happened. I am King of the Fairies, and hereafter I shall rule my own kingdom!"

"It is not much of a kingdom you have now," sobbed the Queen. "I do wish you would send for Grobbo and not be so stubborn. He was always so fond of Crystal. I feel sure he could find her."

This only made the King more obstinate. "No!" he roared. "Never! I have banished him from the kingdom. My daughter will soon be found, and without his help. Columbine, send the soldiers out again."

Night and day the search went on until Crystal had been gone nearly a week and no

trace of her had been found. Busybody Bat hunted so diligently every night that he had no time to fly across the lake and tell Grobbo. Besides, he kept hoping that she would be found, and he did not want to let Grobbo know she was lost if he could help it. At last his courage gave out, and he went to bed very early one morning, fully determined to cross the lake that night and bring Grobbo back with him, regardless of the King's anger. But that evening, when the King returned to the castle, unsuccessful as the rest, he found the fairies gathered in the dry, brown courtyard, tired, discouraged, their wings drooping with weariness.

"Send for Grobbo!" they shouted as they saw him. "He will find the Princess. Look about you—see the wreck of your kingdom. Think of your lost daughter. We want our Councilor! We demand our Grobbo! Bid him return and save the Princess and the kingdom! *Send for Grobbo!*"

Skunk Cabbage, cowering in the wood, heard the mighty shout and shuddered. Busybody Bat, sleeping, hanging to a tree, heard it and woke, flying at once to the castle to see what it was all about.

The King looked around him—at the trees, shorn of many of their leaves, at the dying ferns and flowers. He thought of the castle where the Queen wept all day long. He thought of Crystal herself, his only daughter, so lovely and so loving, and he began to realize what he had done. He shivered in the desolate courtyard as he thought what his willfulness had cost. He had lost his dear daughter. He was losing his kingdom.

"I will send for him!" he cried, loudly, and wiped his eyes as he said it. "But who can go? Who knows in what part of the lonely wood he may be?"

"I'll go—I'll go!" shouted Busybody Bat, and raced through the wood toward the lake. On the way he overtook Skunk Cabbage, waddling away from the castle as fast as his fat legs would take him.

"Hurry—hurry, O, great Councilor," jeered Bat as he flew by him. "I am going for your friend Grobbo. Probably you are on the way to meet him. He will be glad to see you."

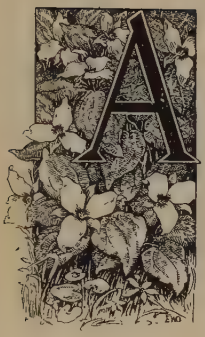
He flew on, and Skunk Cabbage, falling down in fright, crept under a rock and hid.

Back in the courtyard the King was sobbing and crying. "O, my dear daughter," he wailed.

"And O, my poor kingdom! What a sight for Grobbo when he returns! He worked so hard to make it beautiful. And my little daughter worked too—O, dear—O, dear!"

The fairies looked at each other. Then, one by one, they slipped away to their plants and trees and whispered to them as they waited through the long night for the return of Busybody Bat and Grobbo.

CHAPTER VIII



S he reached the shore Bat saw a long line of canoes approaching. In the first one were Grobbo and Painted Trillium. Grobbo was leaning forward, anxiously scanning the shore. Behind them came the whole tribe of Indian Fairies. The canoes leaped rapidly through the water at each powerful sweeping stroke of the ash-seed paddles.

Trillium's keen eyes spied Bat in the air, and he spoke to Grobbo.

"What does this mean?" shouted Grobbo, as Bat sank toward them. "Why have you not been to the Indian wood? Where is my Princess? For many nights now she has failed to answer my signals. I could wait no longer, so have come, in spite of the King's commands, to find out what has happened."

"Alas! Grobbo," answered Bat, "the Princess Crystal is lost."

"Lost?" gasped Grobbo. "Lost! And you did not tell me! When did this happen?"

"More than a week ago," replied Bat. "We have hunted everywhere, but she cannot be found. I did not tell you, because from hour to hour I hoped for good news, and I thought your troubles were heavy enough. It is well you have come. I was on my way even now to bid you return to the Fairy Kingdom. The King recalls you from exile, and implores you to find his daughter."

Before Grobbo could reply, four tiny lights appeared, flashing in the grass of the meadow. He and Bat both saw them.

"The signals!" cried Bat. "Can it be that the Princess has returned?"

"O, Grobbo," called two trembling little voices, "dear Grobbo, wait a minute. O, we are so frightened!"

As the canoe grounded on the sand and Grobbo leaped ashore, the Partridge Berry Twins pushed their way through the thick shrubs, hand in hand, and carrying the fireflies that he had sent to Crystal.

"O, Bat," they panted, all out of breath, "you went so fast we could not keep up with you, and it was such a long way that at last

we could not fly at all and had to descend to the earth and walk, and we have hurried as fast as we could. There are such queer creatures abroad on the ground at night. Grobbo, we knew that Bat was sent to bring you back, and we have come to tell you something. We didn't dare to tell the King, but every day our dear Crystal went to the mouth of the creek

As . . . Grobbo leaped ashore, the Partridge Berry Twins pushed their way through the thick shrubs, hand in hand, and carrying the fireflies that he had sent to Crystal

to watch the Indian woods, hoping for a glimpse of you. Sometimes she went alone. She must have gone there on the day she was lost, but she never reached Mother Red-wing's nest where she used to rest. We know we ought to have told of this before—O, we are so sorry. But now you are here it will be all right. Please go quickly and find her."

"The meadow about the creek has been thoroughly searched," interrupted Bat.

Trillium stepped forward, saying: "My warriors shall sail up the creek at once, Sir Councilor. In their light canoes they can paddle silently its whole length, and their eyes, trained to woodcraft, shall search each dark nook for the pale Princess. We will go now."

"Good," replied Grobbo, "and I will meet you soon at the bridge to hear what success you have."

The Indians vanished in the darkness, and Grobbo turned to comfort the Partridge Berry Twins.

"I know you would not do anything to hurt the Princess," he said, "and Bat says the creek has been searched."

"We hunted there ourselves," they answered, "but we could not find a trace of her. O, Grobbo, we are so glad you have come. All the fairies are watching for you; but we couldn't wait—we had to come and meet you, and tell you what cowards we have been. Come now, let us hurry back, and you will tell us what to do."

They hastened anxiously homeward, Grobbo questioning them all the way. In the orchard

they met his own company of guards, on their way to greet him. The King received him joyfully, and begged him to find the Princess, commanding everyone to obey his slightest order.

"Summon all to the audience chamber," bade Grobbo, "and let each one tell what he knows regarding the disappearance of the Princess Crystal."

But no one except the Partridge Berry Twins knew a single thing to tell. They stood bravely before the assembled company and repeated what they had already told Grobbo. Lord Red Clover, who had had charge of the searching party in the meadow, was very sure she must have gone elsewhere. He was positive she was not near the creek.

"She must be sought from one end of the kingdom to the other," announced Grobbo. "Every house must be entered, and every nook and cranny explored. Each one must do his part. We must lose no time. Sir Mountain Laurel, do you and your strong soldiers fly among the treetops. Enter the home of every bird, and note carefully every leaf. Lord Red Clover, look again through the meadows. Do not miss a blade of grass. Lord Cardinal Flower, watch the banks of the streams and the

hidden pools in the depths of the swamp. Call the hurrying trout that dart along the swirling brooks, and tell them that the Princess Crystal is lost. Ask their aid. Busybody Bat, good, faithful friend, go among the moles that burrow in the earth and the field mice in their hidden homes. Let every creature ask for news of the Princess Crystal."

Master Owl came forward, his great round eyes filled with tears, saying: "I cannot see to fly abroad in the daytime, but I can write beautifully, and every night I will go through the woods, writing the sad tidings on the smooth brown fungus that grows on the trees. Perhaps some one who has seen her may read and give us help."

"I will sound my loud rattle through the land," volunteered Kingfisher. "If anyone is holding her in captivity, he will hear me and be afraid."

"Away, then," ordered Grobbo, "and lose no time."

The greatest sorrow reigned in the Fairy Wood. Sir Mountain Laurel, high among the treetops, heard the leaves sighing, and the birds on their nests asked, "Have you found the Princess?"

Red Clover, in the fields, found the Crickets and Katydids sad and silent. Daddy-Longlegs tottered after him, saying, "Haven't they found that poor child yet?"

In the woods, Walking Fern hurried about, looking behind the rocks. Cardinal Flower, among the streams, found the Ladies Tresses tearing their hair in sorrow, and all the Whirligig Beetles were dashing madly around on the water, looking down at the sandy bottoms and calling: "Where is she? Where is she? Where can she be?"

Grobbo himself, as soon as the council was over, flew to the bridge, where Trillium was awaiting him.

"Have you seen anything?" he inquired at once.

"No," said Trillium, "but I have remembered something. As I paddled over the dark water I thought of the Pale Princess and the night she danced on the sandy beach. I remembered that when I showed her the home of Ovenbird, the Wise One, a lame caterpillar rose out of the grass and threatened her. She told me that unknowingly she had done him an injury when he was small. Do you think that he has been in this neighborhood lately?" Then Grobbo

suddenly remembered the day when Crystal had pulled Caterpillar from his silken carpet and the threats he had made then. His heart grew heavy.

"The caterpillar was big at the time of the revels. He would be very powerful now."

Grobbo said, decidedly: "It may be that he has something to do with the disappearance of the Princess. We must inquire if anyone has seen him."

Columbine and a detail of the Guards went at sunrise through the wood, asking if any had seen Lame Caterpillar. Red Salamander, warming himself on his rock, told them that Caterpillar had inquired of him the way to the beach, but that was before the revels. No one could be found who had seen him since.

All the morning Grobbo flew up and down the creek on a swift dragonfly, hunting among the clumps of haughty Royal Fern, looking into the water and among the bushes along the banks. He found only shy Maidenhair Fern, who shook her head at his questions and hardly dared whisper her bashful answers. He failed to see the great brown house on a willow branch, hidden as it was by the slender leaves. Neither did he see Godmother sitting by the side of

the house and watching him with bright eyes. At last he thought of Little Son John and the Daddy-man with the keen sight. Perhaps they had seen Crystal—he would go and ask them.

As Godmother saw him fly away she smiled and touched the side of the house with her wand. "Sleep peacefully, little one," she said. "Help will soon be here. Happier days are dawning for the fairy kingdom."

Little Son John was blowing loudly on a willow whistle. Grobbo did not heed the noise, but flew straight at him.

"Hullo," said John, calmly. "See my new whistle?"

"Have you seen the Princess?" demanded Grobbo.

"No," replied John, "nor I haven't seen any other fairies either. She said I would, but I didn't, not a one. Kingfisher's round though. I heard him this morning. Are you afraid of him now?"

"He is helping us this time. The Princess is lost and he is hunting for her."

"My Daddy made this whistle," announced John, with no interest in the Princess. "It's a willow whistle. He was down in the meadow by the creek, and he saw all those willows, and

he made me this whistle. There's a caterpillar's nest down there too. It's an awful big one, my Daddy says, and he's goin' to bring it home to me, and we'll keep it in the sitting room, and next spring a big red and brown moth will come out of it. Ain't it funny caterpillars grow into moths?"

Grobbo was not listening. "Where is the nest?" he inquired, hastily.

"Most down to the mouth of the creek, my Daddy says. It's hard to find, the leaves are so thick, but he found it. The caterpillar's in it now, but he's sound asleep—Say, don't you hurt my nest, will you?" John had to shout his question, for Grobbo was racing away.

"Well, sir," said Little Son John to himself, "he appears to be in somewhat of a hurry."

Grobbo rushed back to the castle and called the Partridge Berry Twins. They cried out with delight when they saw his face. "You have heard good news—what is it?"

"Come with me," said Grobbo. "I think I know where my Princess is, but we will not tell anyone till we are quite sure."

He buckled his sword more tightly about him as they flew away. He flew so fast that the Partridge Berry Twins were quite out of

breath trying to keep up with him, and could not ask any questions. But they smiled once more and clasped each other's hands tightly, they were so happy to think that Grobbo was going to find Crystal. In among the willow leaves he dashed, and the twins followed. After a short hunt he found Caterpillar's house, huge and brown, without a door or window to be seen.

"Crystal," he called, softly, fearing to wake Caterpillar. "Crystal, dear, are you there?"

There was no answer. The Partridge Berry Twins exclaimed in horror, "Our Princess is not shut up in this prison, is she?"

"I am going to find out," replied Grobbo, drawing his sword.

"O, be careful! Be careful!" shrieked the Twins. "You will kill her with your sword."

Grobbo bade them be silent, and they watched him fearfully as he cautiously cut his way into the house of Lame Caterpillar. When he had made an opening he peered in. The Twins peeked over his shoulder.

There, in the dark house, tightly bound with ropes of silk, lay the Princess Crystal. Her eyes were closed and she did not move. Grobbo climbed carefully in and returned, bearing her

in his arms. As he laid her on a twig between the pitying Twins Godmother appeared.

"Do not be alarmed," she said. "The Princess is only asleep. No harm has come to her. I have kept her safely, knowing that you would find her, Grobbo. Soon she will wake. No, do not cut the bonds with your sword."

She stooped and touched the silken ropes, which fell away as Crystal stirred and, waking, looked into Grobbo's face. Behind him she saw her loving ladies-in-waiting and Godmother, all as happy as could be.

"Grobbo," she said, "you came, didn't you? I called you when Caterpillar bound me, and while he was spinning his house—afterward I fell asleep."

"We must send word to the castle at once," declared the Partridge Berry Twins, "but who will go? We can't—we shall never leave our Princess again."

"I shall not leave her either," said Grobbo, firmly.

"Godmother mustn't go," said Crystal herself. "I don't want her to go. As soon as I am rested we will all fly back together."

The Twins would not allow this, saying that after her long imprisonment she should not

fly so far. They looked all about for a messenger, and at last they spied Cranberry, wading across the bog.

"Cranberry, Cranberry," they called, "the Princess is found! Will you go to the castle, please, and ask the King to send the royal chariot here?"

Cranberry flew joyfully away, but after a little while Crystal insisted on starting to meet the chariot. "I feel perfectly well," she urged, "and I am so anxious to get home."

They were all talking so fast that they failed to notice the great gray clouds racing up from the west and shutting out the sun. At the edge of the wood they met the King and Queen hurrying to meet them, and followed by the whole Court, excited and rejoicing. The King and Queen embraced Crystal while the fairies shouted: "Our Princess is found by Grobbo! Hurrah! Hurrah! Grobbo has saved the Princess Crystal!"

Just then the gray clouds spread their arms and scattered the good rain over the dry earth. Columbine and the soldiers flew to a spotted beech tree; each soldier picked a leaf and hurried back to a fairy with it. Under their green umbrellas the whole Court whirled merrily on

the rising wind. Through the orchard, past Son John's house, they danced in glee, mad with joy because their Princess was found, because their beloved Grobbo was with them once more, and because the rain had come to save the wood.

John's mother, looking out of the rain-streaked window, said: "The drought is broken and the wind is rising. See it whirl the leaves. They are falling early this year—it has been so dry."

Into the castle swarmed the fairies, impatient to hear of Crystal's adventures, while outside the clouds leaned closer and closer over the wood, reaching down to pour the rain where it was most needed.

Crystal sat on the throne beside her father, who held her close to him. Godmother and the Queen were at her other hand, and Grobbo stood behind the King. A hush fell on the smiling company as she began to speak.

"It all began long ago," she said. "When I was a little girl I did an injury to a caterpillar. I did not mean to, and I thought I was helping him, but when he was moulting I pulled him from his support. In pulling off his old skin he lost two of his legs, and so he was always

lame. He was very angry, and threatened to do me harm. On the night of the revels I saw him again, large and strong, but still lame, and once more he threatened me. The Indian Chief, Trillium, tried to kill him, but he escaped.

"After Grobbo left us I went often to the creek—why, you all know. On the day I disappeared I heard some one call softly from the willows as I flew over. I alighted to see who called. From his hiding place behind a branch Lame Caterpillar reared and seized me. I was too startled and frightened to cry out.

" 'You shall stay with me,' he said. 'I shall build me a house here on this willow branch, where I shall sleep through the winter. You made me lame, and after my winter sleep I shall come forth a moth, but perhaps I shall be a maimed thing, unable to fly. Then it shall be your duty to wait upon me, to procure food for me, and to shield me from my enemies. You were the cause of my misfortune—it is only right that you should live with me and serve me.'

"He bound me with sticky ropes of silk that hardened and held me fast. He was large and strong, and he stood on his hind legs, reaching from branch to branch, stretching the ropes on

which he built his house. He worked very fast while I watched for help. No one came, and soon I could not see the blue sky or the leaves for the silky glistening network that surrounded us. It grew thicker and thicker. For a day and a night he worked, weaving the thick strong walls of his house. Another day and a night divided it into two rooms, an inner and an outer, and then he rested. He did not talk much now, but while he rested he watched me with his wicked eyes, and told me again how I should serve him when he waked from his winter sleep. Soon his words grew slower and slower and at last he spoke no more."

"Did he die?" interrupted Grobbo. "I saw no caterpillar when I took you from his house."

"He was there," replied Crystal, "but I do not wonder that you did not recognize him. He had changed his greenish suit with its gay blue trimmings, and the buttons of blue and yellow and red, for a coat of shining brown armor. Encased in this, he sleeps the winter away, coming out in the spring a great brown moth."

"Lame Caterpillar shall never wake," declared Grobbo. "I go now to kill him—who will follow me?"

The King jumped up from the throne, Columbine strode forward, and the Royal Guards saluted as one man. The Bee Brigade and the Wasp Reserves joined them.

Grobbo led them to the house in the willow tree, and there, on a branch sat Downy Woodpecker, cleaning his bill.

"What's all this?" inquired Downy. "Is there an invasion, that the army comes in full force?"

"We come to kill Lame Caterpillar, who captured the Princess Crystal and would have made her his slave!"

"Caterpillar? Caterpillar?" asked Downy. "The caterpillar that lived in this house? Well, you needn't bother—I've just eaten him for supper!"

CHAPTER IX

THE safe return of the Princess transformed the sorrow in the wood to joy. Once more the fairies went happily about their work; soft showers came at night, the flowers bloomed again, and the whole wood was beautiful as it had been in the spring.

The King was so changed that his subjects hardly knew him. He flew from one end of the kingdom to the other accompanied by Crystal and Grobbo, praising and encouraging the fairies, making friends with the birds and their young families, and telling the squirrels and chipmunks which trees would bear the greatest harvest of nuts. He had proclaimed that Grobbo should marry the Princess Crystal, but had begged to be allowed to keep her with him until the summer work was over. Crystal and Grobbo were glad to wait until the fairies should be at leisure.

Of course a new castle was necessary for the Princess and her husband, so the King and

Grobbo decided to make a tour of the wood in search of a proper habitation. Downy Woodpecker and Chickadee went with them, Downy to sound the walls and see if they were hollow, and Chickadee to examine the state of the bark. All the trees learned of the quest, and each was wishing he could be chosen, for it was a great honor to be the home of the Princess Crystal. They all washed the dust from their leaves very carefully in an August shower, then sent for West Wind to come and sway them gently as the King and his party passed by, in order to show all their beauties. Some of the trees had asked their bird friends to help them, and as the King rode past, bursts of sweet music caused him to look deep among the branches where the singers were hidden. Other trees murmured their good points as he paused to rest, but, finally, a grand white birch, not far from the royal oak, was selected. Its trunk was large and roomy, its beautiful white bark had never been despoiled by the hand of man, its pointed leaves waved gracefully in the breezes, and, best of all, it was near the castle and the Royal Storehouse, and would probably be protected by Little Son John's father, the powerful Daddy-man.

To make sure of this, Crystal and Grobbo paid another visit to Son John. They found him inclined to be cross with Grobbo, as he had been to the willows with his father and found his caterpillar's nest torn and ruined. However, when Crystal told him her experiences he grew very indignant, saying: "Well, sir, that old caterpillar was a regular villain, he was! I'll burn his old house up in my Daddy's fall bonfire—that's what I'll do!" He also promised to ask his father to protect the white birch tree.

The hot summer sun now ripened the berries. Black Alder donned her scarlet necklace, Clematis clambered over the walls, Woodbine painted her leaves red, and the air was full of the buzz and drone of many insects. The Spring Fairies were having a vacation and ran about the wood, playing and frolicking. They visited shy Gray Rabbit and her babies in the nest in the field. Then they flew to the trunks of the maple trees and watched the Ichneumon Fly bore deep into the tree and leave her eggs to hatch and destroy the tree's enemies. But, best of all, they liked to catch the lively Leaf Hoppers and measure their long jumps. Perched on the broad maple leaves, each fairy would choose a Leaf Hopper of a different color—green, blue, white, or

mottled—and then they would put them all in a row and see which one would make the longest leap. Often one would jump way out of sight, leaving his owner staring helplessly about, and then how the other fairies would laugh!

Goldenrod, Tansy, the Purple and White Aster Sisters, lazy Closed Gentian and her cousin, Fringed Gentian, were busy now, but as the weeks went by the wood became less brilliant. The plants did not bear so many flowers, but in their places were plump, full seed-pods, waiting to burst and send their contents abroad to take root in the waiting earth and grow into more plants for the next season.

The fairies had worked all summer in the hot sun and their dresses were faded and dull, so they could hardly be seen as they flitted about, helping their plants to send their seeds to all the best places, hiding some in the earth close to their mothers and sending others floating on the helpful winds, far away. The Partridge Berry Twins were having rather an easy time because Crystal did not take them on her long flights with the King and Grobbo. Yet they seemed happier than usual, and said they

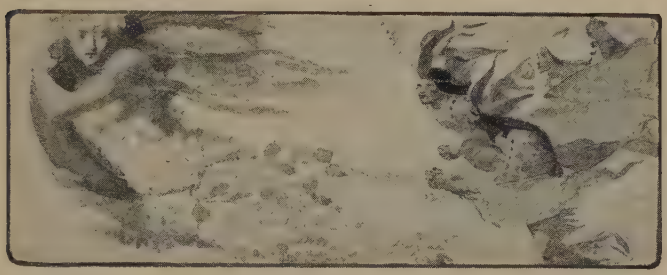
had a great deal to do in order to get all their berries nice and red for the wedding. Their plants were different from all the rest. The little pink flowers grew in pairs, and each pair developed into a fat red berry with two round eyes. So the Partridge Berry Twins had to care for twice as many flowers as the other fairies—that is why they were twins, like their blossoms. Still, Chickadee, on his travels, often saw Cardinal Flower walking with Red Berry beside the brook, while Berry Red seemed to be trying hard to coax her plants from beneath the trees in the wood out into the open meadow. Moreover, it seemed very necessary that Red Clover should help her in this endeavor. This all reminded Chickadee of Mountain Laurel, so one day he flew up the mountainside, and he was not one bit surprised to find Clematis climbing over the walls and bushes, pulling her vines higher up the slope, while Sir Mountain Laurel was approaching in the distance.

"It's all right—right—right!" sang Chickadee on his homeward way. "They'll all be happy! Crystal's happy! Grobbo's happy! The King is happy too!"

At last the fairies' work was almost done. Godmother came back from her summer travels,

and the wedding was fixed for the time of the Hunter's Moon. Grobbo flew across to the Indian pines to tell Trillium and to invite him and his tribe to the ceremony.

"I wish we could have had it in the warm summer time," he said, "when all the flowers were so beautiful, but we couldn't refuse the King's request. Now the wood is dull and dreary, the winds blow cold and winter is on the way."



Trillium and his warriors flew southward and overtook Summer, already far from the Fairy Wood

Trillium said nothing, but after Grobbo had gone home he and his warriors flew southward and overtook Summer, already far from the Fairy Wood.

"Summer, dear Summer," they begged, "come back to the Fairy Wood, if only for a few days. Our good friend Grobbo is to marry the Princess

Crystal, and he mourns because you have gone before the wedding. Do this for us, we beg of you!"

And Summer consented! She came back to the woods with the Indians and hid in a sunny hollow among the dark pines till the morning of the wedding day.

The fairies all felt that they needed new dresses for the festivities, so one evening all the spiders met in the grassy field near the Man's orchard and spun and spun till in the morning, the whole field was covered with shining white webs of silk. Little Son John saw the white-spotted field, and putting his hands in his pockets and looking up at the sky as his Daddy did, announced to his mother: "Well, sir! This is goin' to be a fine day. See the cobwebs on the grass."

Then the spiders folded up the silk and took it to the castle, where they sewed it into the fairy dresses. The Queen cut long strips from her store of colored silk, and each fairy sewed a band on her dress to match her flower. Columbine and the Guards had new uniforms with red and yellow borders.

The birds with their young families came in great numbers to the wood, some of them

delaying their Southern journey until after the wedding. Many of them had already put on their winter dresses in honor of the occasion.

When the trees learned that all the fairies were having new clothes, they whispered among themselves: "We are very shabby. We have worn these old green dresses all through the long, dusty summer. We really must have some new ones ourselves."

The Poplar shook her ringlets in great excitement, saying: "Let us do it in secret. Let us surprise the Princess Crystal."

They all thought that was a fine idea; so, after dark, Sumach ran swiftly north until she found Jack Frost. When he shook hands with her she blushed a rosy red, and hesitatingly told her story. Jack laughed his crackling laugh and agreed to grant her request. She hurried home, arriving just before sunrise, which was fortunate, as her cheeks were flushed, and some one would have surely noticed her, running among the trees.

And where was wicked Skunk Cabbage all these days? No one had heard of him since he disappeared on the day of Grobbo's return. To be sure, no one had hunted for him as they

did for the Princess, but many had wondered where he could be, and Busybody Bat had often glanced about for him as he traveled through the woods at night. The King had revoked his order making Skunk Cabbage a councilor, but had not banished him from the kingdom.

One day Yellowthroat, his grayish-green coat and yellow vest somewhat faded, but his little black mask as bright as ever, came flying among the turrets of the castle. From window to window he went, peeking in, and singing always, "Follow me—follow me—follow me!" until the King and Queen, Crystal and Grobbo came at his call. Not a word would he say but "Follow me—follow me—follow me!" flying in front of them, coaxing them farther and farther away. They were so curious to know what he meant that they followed, down the wood road, across the meadow, and into the swamp.

There, hidden behind a great rock, sat Skunk Cabbage, and he hid his face when he saw them. Yellowthroat gently pulled aside his great green arms, and the fairies exclaimed in wonder and admiration. For Skunk Cabbage was holding carefully a bulky nest, hiding it with his big hands, and driving away all enemies by his

foul odor. The nest was empty, but from the nearby thicket came soft mother-calls and the answering cries of young birds.

"What does this mean?" inquired the Queen.

And Yellowthroat explained:

"My house was stolen by a Boy," he said, "before I could raise my second brood. When we looked for a place to build again, all the desirable spots were taken, but as I flew about in despair, I found Skunk Cabbage here by this rock, breathless and afraid. I had heard from my father what a good friend he was to our race, so I had no hesitation in asking permission to build my house near him. 'I will hold it in my arms,' he replied, 'if you will trust me, and I will faithfully guard your eggs and your babies. I have injured an innocent fairy, but perhaps if I help some one in need I may be forgiven.' So we built our nest, and I and my family have grown to love Skunk Cabbage and to honor him as our protector. He has told me his story. Since we have heard of your wedding, O Councilor Grobbo, poor Skunk Cabbage has mourned because he could not see you and ask your forgiveness. So to-day I have brought you all here that you might see for yourselves how truly he has

repented. Forgive him, I beseech you—I beseech you—I beseech you!"

Skunk Cabbage hung his head, but the fairies surrounded him, assuring him of their forgiveness, and at last he said, "I shall be glad indeed to return to my own people, but what can I do with this nest?"

"We do not need it any longer," joyously replied Yellowthroat. "We shall fly South as soon as the wedding is over, and when we return next year we will build another."

"With me—with me!" insisted Skunk Cabbage, as he went happily back to the Fairy Wood.

The night before the wedding a merry white elf in a pointed cap danced through the wood, leaping lightly from tree to tree. It was Jack Frost, come as he had promised, to bring the trees their new dresses. They were all awake, watching for him. Tall White Pine saw him first and spread the news till it reached the short little shrubs and bushes, who stood on tiptoe, stretching up their arms and calling: "Here we are, down here in the shadow. Don't forget us, Jack Frost—we want new dresses too."

Jack laughed and ran gaily about, touching them all with his frosty fingers, working mar-

velous changes. But wherever his feet touched the earth the flowers and ferns cried, "Keep away! Keep away! You are killing us!" and mourned when they saw the dry brown foot-prints that he left behind him.

White Ash chose a purple dress, the Beeches a deep rich brown; the Poplar picked out a gay gown of bright yellow, while the White Oak castle was very grand and imposing in many shades of dark red. The beautiful White Birch that waited for Crystal selected a dress of palest gold. The Elms had shed their leaves already, and were mourning and holding their bare arms behind the other trees. Jack stood before them, puzzled.

"I don't know what I can do for you," he said, shaking his head.

Poison Ivy, clinging to their trunks with her three-fingered hands, spoke. "Why not change my dress?" she asked. "I will spread myself about them, and if they do not wave their arms too much, no one will notice that their leaves are gone."

The Elms gladly agreed, and Jack gave Poison Ivy a red dress with golden trimmings, and white berry-buttons, so grand that the Elms stood proudly forth again, in gorgeous

clinging robes that swathed them from head to feet.

The Pines, the Firs, and the Hemlocks declined the bright clothing, saying, "We are old and do not like changing fashions; but if you will touch up our last year's branches, we shall be much obliged to you."

So Jack merely gave them a few yellowish trimmings here and there.

When all was done, and the Fairy Wood looked like a huge bunch of bright flowers with a spray of green now and then, Jack Frost scampered back to the North again. As he hurried along a deep voice rolled through the night: "I wish *I* had a nice new dress for the wedding—I wish *I* had a nice new dress for the wedding!" He looked all about to see where the voice came from, and again it sounded, "Up here—away up here!" and at last he saw it was the Mountain speaking.

"I am dingy and gray—I wish I had a new dress!"

"You shall have a beautiful one," declared accommodating little Jack Frost, and he flew up the mountain, decking the trees at the base in reds and yellows, trimming and freshening the evergreens, and the bare stone top he

powdered with glittering frost and snow that shone all through the wedding day and sparkled in the bright light of the Hunter's Moon that night.

Busybody Bat had followed Jack Frost all through the wood and part way to the mountain. Now he was cold and shivering. He saw all the trees in red and yellow and brown. He saw the mountain in its new white cap. He looked at his own shabby brown suit, all rusty at the edges, and he began to cry.

"I am the only creature in the wood without a new dress for Crystal's wedding. She will think I don't care, and I do love her so much!" he sobbed. "What can I do?"

He wondered who could help him, and all at once he thought of Trillium and his Indian warriors. "They paint themselves," he cried, hopefully, "in bright colors like the trees. Perhaps Trillium will paint me—I don't know, but I'll go see." He dried his tears and flew quickly to the Indian pines.

Just before dawn, when everyone was asleep, Summer ran through the wood. She went so fast the flowers could not see her, but she left behind soft breezes and her feet warmed the cold earth. In Jack Frost's footprints she ran,

and the sorrowing plants revived, astonished and rejoicing.

"We dreamed the cruel winter!" they cried to each other. "Summer is still here." Buds that had thought it too cold to bloom now changed their minds, and bright flowers appeared throughout the wood.

Purple Finch woke in a brilliant tree and looked about him in amazement. "Wake up!" he sang. "O, wake up—wake up—the sunrise has fallen on the trees! Wake and behold the miracle!"

In the proud trees the wondering birds awoke, the wood rang with their songs, the sun rose red behind the glistening mountain and greeted woods and fields, newly clothed in honor of Crystal's wedding day!

CHAPTER X

ED BERRY woke first, then Berry Red opened her eyes. They smiled at each other.

"This is Crystal's wedding day, sister," said Red Berry.

"Yes, sister—*Crystal's* wedding day!" replied Berry Red.

Then they laughed aloud and hugged each other.

"Let us wake Clematis," proposed Red Berry. They scrambled out of bed, and without waiting to dress, wrapped themselves in warm thistle-down capes and hurried upstairs. Clematis was just rubbing her sleepy eyes. "Wake up—wake up!" they laughed at her. "This is Crystal's wedding day!"

Clematis sat on the side of the bed and gathered them in her arms. "Yes," she answered, "I know it. *Crystal's* wedding day!"

All three rocked back and forth, laughing, and singing softly, "Crystal's wedding day—yes, Crystal's wedding day!"

Clematis wrapped a corner of Berry Red's

cape about her, and they hurried to Crystal's chamber.

"Wake—wake, Princess!" they called. "It is your wedding day!"

Crystal ran to the window to see if the sun was shining, and cried out in amazement: "The trees! Look at the trees! What has happened to them?"

Clematis and the Partridge Berry Twins hurried to the window. A new world lay before them.

"O, see the mountain," cried Clematis. "See its snowy cap!"

Red Berry leaned far out and looked toward the creek, while Berry Red gazed only at the meadow.

"Who has done this?" asked Crystal. "Let us dress quickly and call the others."

In front of the castle they found the fairies gathering, exclaiming and wondering at the beautiful sight. Many of them reported that their plants had put forth unexpected blossoms, and great was the astonishment. If Godmother knew what caused the transformation, she would not tell, but only smiled at their questions.

Suddenly a flapping and fluttering was heard,

and Busybody Bat sank exhausted in their midst. His wings were trembling and weak from long flight, and his soft, furry coat was draggled and dirty.

"Bat, dear Bat," cried Crystal, running to his side, "what is the matter? Where have you been?"

Bat turned his head toward the sound of her voice, and tears streamed from his eyes, blinded by the bright sunlight.

"Princess," he said, sorrowfully, "I have been hunting for a new dress for your wedding. Even the trees are freshly clothed—"

"The trees?" interrupted many voices. "Do you know what happened to the trees?"

"Yes, indeed! As I flew about the wood last night I saw Jack Frost come down from the North. In the clear moonlight I saw him fly from tree to tree, touching them with his icy fingers, taking away their green dresses and leaving these gay ones. I wanted to ask him to give me a new dress too, but his cold breath chilled me, stiffening my wings so I could not overtake him. Then I thought of Trillium and Moccasin Flower, who paint themselves with many colors, and I flew across the lake to ask their aid. I thought perhaps they would

decorate my dingy brown, but though I searched the pine woods through and through I found no one. The dawn was coming, so I hurried home, but the cruel light caught me and I could scarcely find my way. And alas! not only have I no new dress, but my old coat is so ruffled and soiled that I am ashamed to be seen!"

Crystal stooped over him, stroking his head. "Never mind, dear Bat," she said. "We should not know you in a gorgeous coat. Your silky brown suit is so dear to us we should not want you to change. Have you not given us many proofs of your kind heart, shining bright with loving thoughts? Is not Busybody Bat the friend of all of us?"

The King approached, saying: "You must stay here to-day and rest. In one of the inner rooms of the castle you shall hang and sleep in the dark, refreshing yourself until evening."

"Yes, yes," cried the Partridge Berry Twins, "and his coat shall be brushed with brushes of thistledown and combed with a hemlock twig until it is smooth and shiny."

Columbine led Bat into the castle, where he spread his broad wings, while two soldiers brushed him with long soothing strokes until

he forgot his troubles and fell into a deep sleep, snoring loudly all day long.

Later in the forenoon four guards brought Skunk Cabbage's great chair out from the castle, and here he sat in the courtyard, greeting his old friends and answering their questions about his experiences with Yellowthroat and his family. The King had caused Solomon's Seal

Skunk Cabbage . . . sat in the courtyard, greeting his old friends

to write a full account of the occurrence, and Master Owl had posted it on the wall by the castle door where all might read. Nearly every one stopped to read it, then hurried to Skunk Cabbage to shake his hand, but they were obliged to do it very gently, because his arms and hands were lame and sore from holding the nest all summer. Witch-Hazel had bathed and bandaged them, and Self-Heal stood by his side. As he sat there he could see the Squirrels

and Chipmunks hurrying by in the treetops, bringing their wedding gifts to the Princess.

They made many trips, bringing nuts and acorns from their secret hiding places to store the larders of the birch tree. "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" they called as they scuttled along the branches, leaping from tree to tree. "Hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry!"

Every little while the Partridge Berry Twins or Clematis would bustle by, looking very important and always seeming on the verge of telling some wonderful piece of news. Once Berry Red nearly said something, but she clapped her hand over her mouth in time and ran away laughing. Altogether it was very exciting and mysterious, and Skunk Cabbage was so happy to be at home again.

Early in the afternoon Downy Woodpecker appeared. He came alone because he had been in the Man's orchard, excavating his new winter house in the branch of an apple tree. When Mrs. Downy came later he greeted her affectionately, as they were on the best of terms, although she was not to spend the winter in the new house, but would live alone in the old one, made a year before. Truant Officer Kingfisher rattled through the wood, arousing

the curiosity of a flock of Jays, who flapped after him, calling, "Sa-ay, say, say!" They were such inquisitive birds, always trying to ask questions, but never getting beyond their monotonous "Say, say, say." The Crows followed the Jays, drawling, hoarsely, "Wha-a-at, wha-a-at, wha-a-at?" and settled on the white pines, patiently waiting to see what would happen. Chickadee perched on the topmost turret of the castle, watching anxiously for Nuthatch. He had sent him word of the wedding, and Nuthatch had promised faithfully to be there. No one was in sight and Chickadee hopped about, standing on his head in his impatience. At last, faint and far away, he heard Nuthatch calling and flew to meet him, crying, "Come-and-see-see-see! Come-and-see-see-see!"

Toward sunset Tree Toad, trilling on the protecting bark, saw Mountain Laurel and his fairies flying from the distant mountain. Down slid Tree Toad to Wood Frog, hiding among the fallen brown leaves. "Mountain Laurel is coming," he said.

Wood Frog called to Red Salamander, gliding by: "Mountain Laurel is coming."

Salamander ran quickly to the castle gate.

"Mountain Laurel is coming," he said to the guard.

A detail of soldiers started to meet Sir Mountain Laurel, and when he arrived at the castle the King stood at the entrance to welcome him. A white feathery seed floated down to him as he talked with the King, and he looked up to see Clematis waving her hand at him from a window.

Again Tree Toad called to Wood Frog. "The air is full of white balloons floating from the meadow. They are coming this way."

Wood Frog looked up, but the branches obstructed his view. "Tree Toad says the air is full of white balloons," he said to Salamander.

Salamander ran out into an open space and climbed on a slanting rock to look up at the sky. He scampered down the rock in a hurry and ran fast to the castle gate. "The air is full of white balloons," he shouted to the guard. "They came from the meadow."

Almost instantly the ground about the castle, the bushes and the trees became alive with tiny spiders, each floating gently down on a silky streamer that had buoyed him through the air. They ran about, calling softly, "Lord Red Clover is coming—he is on the way."

A company of soldiers went to greet Red Clover, and the King received him at the gate.

"Hoo-hoo! Hoo-hoo!" came a shrill little call from above, and a round, rosy face peeped down at him. Red Clover blushed pinker than ever as he recognized Berry Red.

Once more Tree Toad trilled to Wood Frog: "Cardinal Flower is marching from the brook."

"Salamander," called Wood Frog, "Cardinal Flower is marching from the brook."

Salamander went for the third time to the castle gate. "Cardinal Flower is marching from the brook," he said.

The soldiers met Cardinal Flower and his fairies marching in double-quick time, for Cardinal Flower had spent so much time looking at himself in the water that they were late.

As they saluted the King at the gate Red Berry's anxious little face appeared above them. Cardinal Flower saw her, and she smiled, much relieved, and blew him a kiss.

All had now arrived except the Indian Fairies, but soon they were seen, threading their cautious way through the unfamiliar woods. In single file they came, Trillium ahead, very splendid in his paint and great headdress, then Moccasin Flower, bearing beaded sandals for

the Pale Princess he had watched in the spring.

The fairies now retired to the castle to put on their wedding garments, and the guests scattered about the courtyard to rest and refresh themselves.

When everyone had gone the White Pine Trees growing near the castle leaned far over the great open space where the wedding was to be and shook themselves violently. Down from their outspread arms fell thousands of fragrant needles that covered last year's old brown carpet with a beautiful layer of yellow. So the Pines brought their gift to Crystal.

The Hunter's Moon rose huge in the sky. Busybody Bat woke and flew out into the night. The Squirrels and Chipmunks took their places on the branches, and the air resounded with the twitterings of birds, now on their way to new homes, but stopping to-night in the fairy wood to attend the wedding of the Princess Crystal. Tree Toad, Wood Frog, and Red Salamander sat close together in the roots of a big tree. Mistress Mole came, creeping along so softly that Bat could hardly find her to escort her to the place the King had reserved for her. Soon the fairies appeared, all in their

white dresses and settled into their places with much chattering and laughter and many friendly greetings.

At last, above the confusion, came the beautiful note of the Hermit Thrush. Everyone became quiet. Again it sounded, and all looked toward the castle entrance.

Guards threw open the great doors. The King advanced, leading the Queen and Godmother, and followed by the ladies in waiting. When they were seated the sweet note came again. Jack-in-the-Pulpit marched slowly out and took his place beneath a spreading fern, now bleached nearly white. At a signal from Anemone, all the fairies stood, turning toward the castle and singing softly as the wedding procession approached.

Crystal and Grobbo, both in snowy white, appeared. The birds in the trees burst into song. The fairy chorus swelled in unison.

Everyone had supposed that the Partridge Berry Twins would attend the Princess, and there they were, but—they were not walking hand-in-hand, but one behind the other! And each wore a wedding dress! And each wore a bridal veil, while by the side of one walked proud Sir Cardinal Flower and with the other

came Lord Red Clover! Following was tall Clematis, also in bridal array, with sturdy Mountain Laurel at her side. Behind marched all of Crystal's playmates.

The Twins were so very shy and embarrassed that they could not raise their eyes from the ground, and no one could tell which was which. They walked along, not daring to look at anyone, even at their bridegrooms. The four couples took their places before Jack-in-the Pulpit, the music ceased, and the ceremony proceeded.

Crystal and Grobbo were made husband and wife and stepped aside to join the King and Queen. Clematis and Sir Mountain Laurel were also wedded and took their places. All the time the Partridge Berry Twins were growing more nervous, and when their turn came they were trembling so they could hardly stand. Red Berry was nearer Jack-in-the-Pulpit, and he addressed her companion.

"Red Clover, do you—"

Two loud shrieks interrupted him.

Everyone looked startled and alarmed.

"O—O," screamed Red Berry, "I don't want Red Clover for my husband! Where is Cardinal Flower?"

Berry Red was now clinging to his arm, while Red Berry wept on Cardinal Flower's shoulder

"O—O," cried Berry Red, now looking at the nobleman beside her for the first time. "Go away! Go away! I won't marry you! I want my Red Clover."

Red Clover and Cardinal Flower glared angrily at each other.

"Sir, what do you mean by stealing my bride?" demanded Cardinal Flower.

"It is you who have stolen mine!" replied Red Clover, fiercely.

Berry Red was now clinging to his arm, while Red Berry wept on Cardinal Flower's shoulder.

"Which is which?" demanded the perplexed Jack-in-the-Pulpit of Crystal, who had hurried to his side.

"This is Red Berry," said Crystal, bewildered, "but why was she not with Cardinal Flower?"

"I was so nervous and so afraid when I thought about all the guests that I dared not look at anyone, and I did not know who was walking with me," said poor Red Berry.

"Sister, neither did I," responded Berry Red.

All was finally arranged and the Partridge Berry Twins were at last married to the right

husbands. Such a clamor arose among the fairies then! The surprises of the weddings were all talked over, and Hermit Thrush had to call three times before it became quiet enough for Godmother to address them.

"Dear people," she said, "our beloved Princess is married to Grobbo, who saved her from the caterpillar's prison. To-night they go to their new home in the beautiful White Birch Mansion. Her faithful attendants, the Partridge Berry Twins, have also married the fairies of their choice." (Here everybody laughed.) "As they cannot bear to be separated, Lord Red Clover and Sir Cardinal Flower have decided to build a home together in the great Willow Tree by the brook, half of whose branches overhang the water, while the rest cast grateful shade over the meadow. Thus the sisters may dwell together, and their husbands rule over their own domains. Clematis will leave us—to go to a home among the rocky pastures on the mountainside with the noble knight, Mountain Laurel.

"You have wondered at the flowers which bloom anew in the wood, and at the gentle breezes stirring the trees. Trillium, the faithful friend of our Councilor Grobbo, heard him

regretting that his wedding could not take place in the summer. So, although Summer was far away, Trillium followed and persuaded her to return. At his request she brought her treasures back for a short time, and this she will do every year. In memory of the happy wedding of Crystal and Grobbo, there shall be a space in the dreary autumn when flowers shall bloom, birds shall sing, and warm breezes shall blow again. This season shall, in honor of Trillium's wedding gift, be known as Indian Summer! This is my decree!"

In the midst of the applause that followed this announcement, Trillium stood silent and apparently unmoved, but his dark eyes responded to Crystal's grateful glance.

Godmother resumed: "You may wonder that the Princess has received nothing from me." She turned to the King. "If you remember the deeds of your King during the weeks since his daughter's return, I think you will agree with me that the best wedding gift of the Princess Crystal is her new father. And my gift to my godchild is the assurance that this new father will never again have the hasty temper of other days."

The fairies all applauded, for they had grown

to love the King. He rose, and stretched out his arms to his subjects.

"I cannot talk," he said, "but I will live what I should like to say!"

All formality was now ended, and Herb Robert, John's-wort, Cinquefoil, with a corps of helpers, brought out great tables piled high with nuts and honey, while others served elderberry wine. For a long time they feasted; then the migrant birds resumed their Southern journey, the Squirrels and Chipmunks scampered to their holes, and Mistress Mole departed to her burrow.

The Partridge Berry Twins bade Crystal good-night and went with their husbands to their new domains. Four of Mountain Laurel's stalwart soldiers carried Clematis in a red-oak leaf litter to her mountain home.

Crystal and Grobbo watched them all out of sight. Then their own fairies escorted them to the waiting Birch Tree. Hand in hand they stood in the doorway, waving good-night to the long line of fairies that circled about the tree, rising higher and higher, till they vanished on the pale moonbeams that slanted through the trees.

Grobbo closed the door, but, all night long,

they heard at intervals the song of Busybody Bat as he darted happily about in the golden branches:

"Lovely Princess Crystal!
Grobbo, bold and free!
Happy ever after
In the White Birch Tree!"

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